JUNE 2014
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164 PRODUCTS REVIEWED!

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LAUNDRY DETERGENTS
57 shades of grey

PRESCRIBING YOUR POLICY
Our guide to hospital cover

BREKKIE BIKKIES
Shortcut or short-changed?

TESTS
- Electric heaters
- Tyres
- Dishwashers
- Electric toothbrushes
- Slow cookers
- Car roof boxes
- Headphones

FOOD MATTERS
The good, the bad, the unhealthy

Food, inglorious food

We've subjected breakfast and kids' foods to the Health Star Ratings system – and the results are not encouraging

Australia's food ministers will be meeting later this month to discuss the proposed new Health Star Ratings scheme, which is designed to provide better, easy-to-read nutritional information on the front of packages.

Two areas that attract the biggest marketing budgets – and therefore some of the shonkiest nutritional claims – are breakfast and children's foods. Our analysis of these two areas (pages 21 and 26) shows just how useful a better labelling system will be.

Filling kids' lunchboxes is a challenge for any parent, involving a delicate balancing act of nutritional value against what they're actually likely to eat. And these decisions are often made when you have the least time to think – in the supermarket aisle and when you're trying to get everyone dressed and out of the house in the morning.

Our review of lunchbox products shows just how much the nutritional value can differ between them, and how the Health Star Rating system will show this up. We analysed more than 265 snacks using the ratings calculator, and the results were underwhelming. Only three items received the maximum 5 stars, while more than half the products earned 2½ stars or less.

Our review of breakfast foods also found big variations. We zeroed in on some of the "convenience" breakfast foods such as breakfast biscuits (yes, there apparently is such a thing!), oat cups and single-serve chia pods. The breakfast biscuits struggled to break 2½ stars, and while the oats did well for nutrition, their cost might make you wonder how much you are willing to pay for convenience.

At CHOICE we're always keen to sniff out rip-offs, and the world of medications rarely fails to deliver. Recently we've been looking at painkillers, where there is a proliferation of products with different names. Upon closer examination, however, we found some products that look very different were actually the same – manufacturers are using packaging and marketing claims as a ruse to distract consumers from noticing the massive price markups on some products.

If you'd rather spend any excess cash you have on philanthropy than premium painkillers, you may have dipped a toe into the world of crowdfunding through fundraising campaigns on sites like Pozible and Kickstarter. This is a whole new world, and in Australia relatively unregulated (see page 35). While individual donations are often small, they aren't always, so it's worth understanding the risks.

We discuss the case for better regulation here, although given the Abbott government's focus on red-tape reduction, that's probably not likely to happen anytime soon. In the meantime, we provide some tips on how to vet people seeking funding to help you make sure your donations have an impact.

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For general membership & consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims. **SUBSCRIBE** To review the full range of membership benefits available to you, go to **choice.com.au/signup** and compare all our options for providing you access to our premium content across our website, mobile, tablet and print products. **SUBSCRIPTIONS/RENEWALS** Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**

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Listen up: the best on test can be found here

Zoya Sheftalovich breaks down the bevy of brekkie blitz products

Breakfast in a biscuit? Find out why we're not totally convinced on page 26

Dangerous goals

The ACCC has issued a warning about the dangers of moveable soccer goals.

Globally, 49 people have died from related injuries. In Australia, there have been seven deaths and multiple serious injuries over the past 30 years, with many of the incidents affecting children or teens.

If you're dealing with freestanding goals weighing 28kg or more (not the lightweight plastic kind), make sure they're anchored down, checked properly before play and stored away safely afterwards. It takes 200kg to secure the goalposts properly, which equals:

- 10 stakes
- 12 bags of sand, or
- 10 bags of cement mix.

JEMMA CASTLE

Apple v Samsung: Apple wins $US120m

Samsung has been ordered to pay Apple $US120 million in settlement of a lawsuit over smartphone patents, while Apple has to pay Samsung nearly $US160,000 in a counter-suit. The outcome for both companies is a far cry from the $US2.2 billion asked for by Apple and the $US6 million wanted by Samsung.

The judgment in the US District Court for Northern California was the latest in the long-running string of intellectual property lawsuits and counter-suits between the two companies. Apple accused Samsung of infringing five patents, including slide-to-lock, auto-correct and search features. Samsung argued that Apple infringed patents related to video transmission and camera usage.

The judgment may reportedly be worth more to Apple after the judge urged the jury to reconsider its verdict on one of the patents in question.

In a separate case in 2012, Apple was awarded more than $1bn in a similar look-and-feel lawsuit, which is being appealed. Both tech giants have several lawsuits still in play as they battle for dominance in the global smartphone and tablet market.

STEVE DUNCOMBE

BREAKING NEWS

FoFA farce

CHOICE and other consumer groups have recommended that legislation diluting financial advice protections be abandoned as it will expose consumers to unnecessary financial risk, in a submission to the Senate Committee on Economics. Over 100,000 consumers lost $5.7bn in financial collapses such as Storm Financial, Opes Prime and Great Southern in Australia from 2006-2010. And in 2012, an ASIC shadow shop found only three per cent of financial advice was good quality. In 2012, protections were introduced to ensure financial advisers had to act in your best interests, known as the Future of Financial Advice (FoFA) reforms. Now the government is introducing laws that will wind back these essential consumer protections.

ERIN TURNER

Allergy urgency

The rates of Australian children with allergies and intolerances to foods such as peanuts, eggs and dairy continues to rise. At the same time, experts are calling on the federal government to recognise allergies as a national health priority.

The Australian Health Survey shows that almost four million people avoid certain foods because of allergies and intolerance, many of whom were children.

Australia has one of the highest incidences of food allergies in the world, with one in 10 babies born developing a food allergy by the age of one.

KATE BROWNE

No, Harvey!

Several Harvey Norman franchises are in hot water with the consumer watchdog – again. Australian courts have ordered four franchises to pay fines totalling $86,000; they're the latest to come out of a slew of proceedings brought by the ACCC, with nine judgments to date against Harvey Norman franchisees. The franchises made false or misleading representations to consumers about their rights, including that the franchisee had no obligation to help if a product was still covered by the manufacturer's warranty and they'd have to pay postage and handling to get their product back.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

ISP collapse

Thousands of elderly people left without internet and landline phone services following the collapse of ISP ONEseniors have been urged to cancel their automatic payments and find another provider "as soon as humanly possible".

The plea came from Vocus Communications, which stepped in to take over. ONEseniors, which specialised in discounted internet and phone services for the over-55s, went into administration, leaving its elderly customers effectively cut off.

STEVE DUNCOMBE

Baby monitor hacked

A couple in the US has reportedly been woken up by the sound of a man's voice in their home, only to discover the stranger had hacked an internet-connected webcam being used as a baby monitor. The incident has once again highlighted the dangers of poor security on net-capable smart devices in the home.

It's not the first incident of its kind. In the US last year, a man reportedly gained control of a net-connected webcam in the baby's bedroom of a Texas home.

Remote-access baby monitors and web cameras are becoming more popular, as they allow parents to keep a close eye (and ear) on their child from anywhere in the home or even outside. The nature of the device means that people often leave them on all or most of the time. But whether you use a specially designed baby monitor or remotely accessible webcam for the same purpose, it can be vulnerable to hackers.

To read more and check out CHOICE's guide to securing your connection, head to **choice.com.au/babymonitorhacked**

STEVE DUNCOMBE

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK SOURCE * AUSTRALIAN ENERGY MARKET OPERATOR ^ATA** SOURCE: THE GRATTAN INSTITUTE

Gas prices set to rise

The average gas consumer in NSW is expected to pay between $135 and $226 more each year on their gas bill through to June 2016. This follows a draft decision from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal allowing for an average 17.6% increase in regulated retail gas prices. And Victorians may pay up to $170 more per year through 2020.

With Australia set to become an exporter of liquid natural gas, future price hikes appear to be on the horizon for all eastern states. Meanwhile, electricity prices are expected to stabilise in the coming years after a run of sharp increases.

So does this mean it's time to re-think the conventional wisdom that heating or cooking with gas is cheaper? According to a recent analysis by the Alternative Technology Association (ATA), consumers who have a single gas appliance will save $200-300 each year in fixed gas charges if they switch to an electric unit.

However, CHOICE is not recommending that consumers ditch their gas appliances based on these forecasts alone, especially since the cost of a new electric appliance will at least partially offset any energy savings, and electric heating of larger homes may be problematic, since electric heaters are limited to 2.4kW of power.

There's also the environment to consider. Using gas appliances generates fewer carbon emissions compared with electric ones.

But at the least, it's probably time to look at electricity versus gas in a new light. Consider these figures:

- 1% – the average annual increase in household electricity prices in NSW and Victoria in real terms (or 3% including inflation) over the next five years*^
- 5% – average annual increase in household gas prices in NSW and Victoria over the next five years^
- $170 – the average annual increase in household gas costs for Victoria over the next five years**

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

How will the Budget affect you?

The Abbott government has released its first Budget, and it promises to be a tough one for many households. CHOICE reveals what it means for many Aussies' bottom lines.

IF YOU NEED HEALTHCARE

If you're one of those Australians who sees a doctor (and most of us do), prepare to take a hit to the hip pocket after July 2015. Those who visit a GP or get a blood test or X-ray and are currently bulk billed will pay a Medicare co-payment of $7 every visit, with an annual cap of 10 payments for children under 16 or concession card holders. Patients who go to public hospitals with non-emergencies could be charged a co-payment too.

Even if your doctor doesn't bulk bill, you'll pay more. The Medicare rebate for GP and pathology services will be cut by $5, and you'll probably have to pick up the shortfall.

The cost of medicine will also go up. Medications listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme that cost more than the co-payment rate (currently $37.70) will go up by $5. And the PBS safety net, which protects patients who buy lots of medicines by reducing co-payments once they've spent a certain amount on medication in one calendar year, will also take a hit.

So where's that money going? The government is redirecting it to a new medical research future fund, which it claims will be the largest of its kind in the world.

IF YOU DRIVE A CAR

The government is unfreezing the indexation of the fuel excise. It's set to rise in line with inflation twice a year, starting in August.

IF YOU'RE HAVING A BABY

You could be in luck – the Paid Parental Leave scheme is set to kick in from 1 July 2015. Under the scheme, you'll get paid parental leave provided by the government up to the value of $50,000 – six months at full pay, matching salaries up to $100,000.

IF YOU HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN

This Budget will be a blow to the bottom lines of single-income families, where the breadwinner is on an income of between $100,000 and $150,000. Families will only be eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part B payments if the parent doesn't earn above $100,000 and their youngest child has yet to turn six. Existing recipients of Part B with children six or older will continue to receive payments for two years.

IF YOU'RE A SINGLE PARENT

Those receiving Family Tax Benefit Part B whose children are six years or older will now be eligible to receive a $750 payment annually for each child aged between six and 12.

IF YOU'RE PLANNING TO RETIRE/GO ON THE PENSION

The pension entitlement age will be increased to 70 from 2035, affecting anyone currently in their late 40s or younger.

IF YOU'RE A PENSIONER

Pensions will be indexed to growth in the consumer price index rather than keeping pace with average wage growth from 2017.

IF YOU'RE A STUDENT OR PLANNING ON STUDYING

It's a particularly tough Budget for students. University prices are going to be deregulated, opening the door for institutions to set their own fees. Prestigious degrees at top universities are likely to cost more, although some degrees at less desirable universities may be in the bargain basement bin soon.

Additionally, the average proportion of higher education costs paid by the Commonwealth will fall by 20%, and students will have to start paying back HECS debt sooner.

On the upside, the government will now provide the same funding and HECS loans as currently available to public university students to those at private colleges and TAFEs.

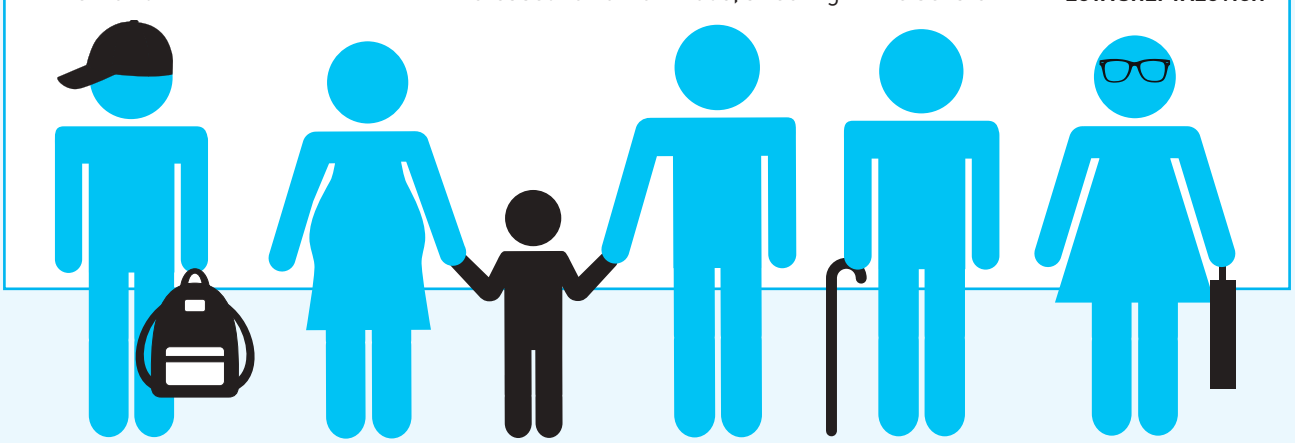
IF YOU'RE A HIGH INCOME EARNER

The Temporary Budget Repair Levy will add two per cent in tax to income above $180,000 for three years.

WILL THE CHANGES PASS?

While this Budget seems to hold a lot of pain for many consumers, some of its toughest measures may not pass the Senate.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



No boost from prenatal fish oil

An Australian study has found no cognitive benefits in children whose mothers took an omega-3 supplement during pregnancy.

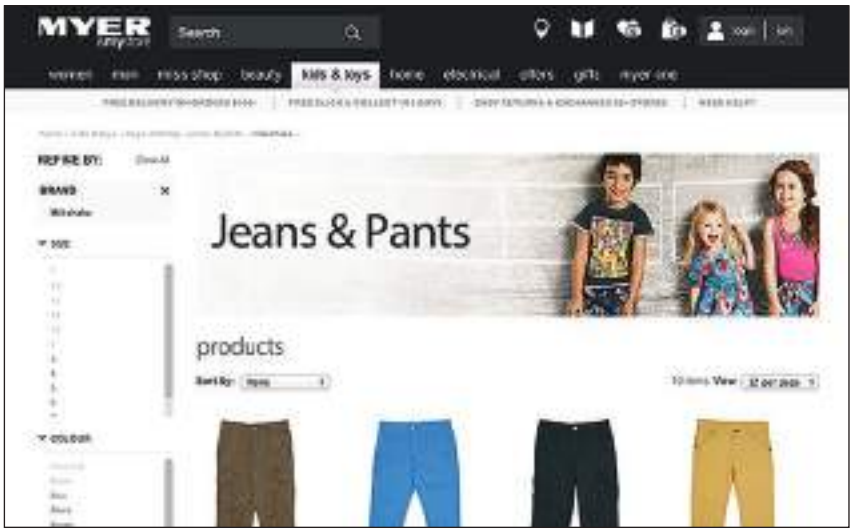
The study from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute in Adelaide followed up the children of 646 women, of whom about half were given docosahexaenoic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid found in fish and marine algae, during pregnancy.

The children of the women were followed up at 18 months, with no effect found, and again at four years of age, by which time any differences in cognitive development should have been apparent. However, there were no significant differences in ability to perform complex mental processing, language, and executive functioning (such as memory, reasoning, problem solving) between groups.

Fish oil supplements are often recommended during pregnancy, and while there is not a lot of evidence for benefits, there's also no evidence of harm. However, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists does not recommend the supplements in its current position statement on prenatal dietary supplements. **KARINA BRAY**

CORRECTION

In our recent gluten story (*CHOICE*, Apr 14), the price for the Macro and Homebrand flours on page 29 should be per kilogram rather than per 100g.



Chemicals in clothing recall

Multiple fashion retailers including Target, Rivers, Just Jeans, Trade Secret and Pillow Talk have recalled clothing and manchester that has been found to have fabric dyed with the hazardous azo dyes, with Myer the latest to join the list. Myer has issued recalls on two lines of boys' jeans after the dyes were detected in the pocket lining of the "Milkshake" and "Wayne Jnr" brands.

Azo dyes and colourants are often used in the colouring process for textiles and leather products. Some azo colouring agents may break down to form amines that may have carcinogenic properties, as CHOICE discovered in a recent investigation (see **choice.com.au/clothingchemicals**).

There are very few regulations in Australia regarding chemicals in textiles and footwear

The EU and the US have strong regulations in place with regard to chemicals in textiles and footwear. But in Australia, there are very few barriers in place. A Myer spokeswoman told CHOICE suppliers have been contacted and told that use of the dye in Myer products is banned. However, the retailer is frustrated by the lack of clarity around legislation. "The Australian government has not legislated to ban azo dyes, and it would assist the industry if the government could clarify its position," she said.

In March, the ACCC conducted a recall of two styles of children's jeans from Rivers Australia, one style of kids' jeans and one style of denim shorts from Just Jeans, and a pillow case from Pillow Talk, all of which may contain potentially harmful azo dyes. Independent SA senator, Nick Xenophon, has called on the ACCC to block imports of dangerous chemicals in clothing following the recall. He called for an urgent audit of garment and bedding imports, saying it's "astonishing that there appear to be no laws or rules in place to restrict the importation of products containing azo dyes". Consumers who've bought these jeans should stop wearing them and may return the garment to any Myer store for a full refund of the purchase price. For more information, call 1800 811 611 or email myer.csc@myer.com.au **KATE BROWNE**

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

New cervical cancer test coming

A new cervical screening test for the human papillomavirus (HPV) may replace the current regime of Pap tests once every two years with one every five years.

Australia's Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC), which recommends health treatments to be covered by Medicare, says it supports public funding for the new test for all women aged between 25 and 69 years (and women of any age with symptoms such as pain or bleeding), with exit testing of women up to 74 years of age.

The MSAC has also recommended that women who are under-screened or unscreened (for example, those with cultural barriers to participating) should be able to provide a self-collected sample for the test.

If the recommendation is approved by the government, the new testing regime could be in place by 2016, with the existing testing (once every two years) remaining in place until then.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Shark cartilage mercury warning

A study of 16 shark cartilage products on sale in the US found every one was contaminated with mercury. Fifteen were contaminated with a neurotoxin linked to motor neurone disease called beta-Methylamino-L-alanine (BMAA). While the amounts were small, mercury and BMAA together have a synergistic effect – that is, they enhance the effects of each other.

> "Just because it's natural, that doesn't make it safe"

This raises concerns about shark cartilage products sold in Australia. Available in health food stores, pharmacies and online, they're promoted for treating cancer (for which there's no evidence) and osteoarthritis. Some osteoarthritis supplements contain chondroitin, which can be derived from shark cartilage, although the jury is still out on whether it is helpful.

The Australian regulatory framework allows supplements from animal cartilage, which are considered low-risk ingredients, to be listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (they carry AUST L on the label) with fewer checks than higher-risk products. The listing process relies on claims by sponsors, with random checks by the regulators.

"In most cases the worst side effect you can expect from this self-regulated process is a lightening of your wallet," says medical researcher, Dr Rachael Dunlop.

"But when it comes to neurotoxic contaminants that have been linked to triggering terminal disease, the consequences are much more serious. I hope this latest research leads to consumers being cautious when choosing what they put in their mouths, especially when the risks outweigh the benefits. Just because it's natural, that doesn't make it safe."

KARINA BRAY

Cardless cash

Commonwealth Bank (CBA) customers can now withdraw so-called "cardless cash" from an ATM without a bank card by using their smartphones for the first time. Westpac is also following suit with its own card-free cash system later this year.

CBA's Cardless Cash allows its customers to withdraw up to $200 a day through their smartphone. Customers will even be able to arrange for someone else to withdraw the cash in an emergency. Using the smartphone app, customers receive two PINs – one via the app and the other via SMS (which they can send to a loved one if need be). These two PINs will then enable someone to withdraw the cash at around 3000 CBA ATMs. The PINs expire within 30 minutes.

Westpac has also announced a card-free cash solution to be rolled out from July, with the app component ready in September. From July, Westpac customers will be able to phone the bank's call centre to obtain a six-digit cash code. The code, valid for around three hours after the call, can be used to make three withdrawals of up to $1000 a day, with a $2000-a-week limit. The same limits will apply to customers using the app to withdraw cash when it comes out later this year.

JEMMA CASTLE

ACCC accuses Coles of poor treatment of suppliers

The ACCC has instituted proceedings in the Federal Court against Coles for alleged unconscionable conduct towards its suppliers. A CHOICE investigation published in 2012 (see **choice.com.au/supermarkets**) revealed the supermarket was charging suppliers a rebate to use an online "distribution portal" the supermarket had set up.

The consumer regulator will argue that Coles engaged in unconscionable conduct in relation to the portal – its Active Retail Collaboration (ARC) program, launched in 2011 – in contravention of the Australian Consumer Law (ACL). This was part of a strategy developed by Coles to improve its earnings by obtaining better trading terms from its suppliers, the ACCC says.

The ACCC alleges that Coles introduced ongoing "rebates" to be paid by its suppliers in connection with the ARC program. The program involved the launch of a website portal that allowed suppliers to monitor their stock levels in Coles' distribution chain. Coles then charged suppliers for the use of the portal, based on assumptions they made about the benefits to suppliers.

According to the ACCC, Coles sought to obtain $16m in ARC rebates from smaller suppliers, requiring 200 of them to agree to pay within a matter of days. "If these suppliers declined to agree to pay the rebate, Coles personnel were allegedly instructed to escalate the matter to more senior staff, and to threaten commercial consequences if the supplier did not agree," the ACCC says. "The ACCC alleges that, in a number of cases, threats were made when suppliers declined to agree to pay the rebate."

The ACCC alleges that Coles introduced ongoing "rebates" to be paid by its suppliers

"The conduct of Coles alleged by the ACCC in these proceedings was capable of causing significant detriment to small suppliers' businesses," ACCC chair Rod Sims said. "This could have resulted in these businesses becoming less able to plan and less able to innovate in the market, with resulting reduced economic efficiency and consumer detriment.

"If this conduct is established in court, the ACCC expects that the community will share the ACCC's view that business should not be conducted in this way in Australia."

CHOICE spoke with several suppliers in 2011 and 2012 regarding the big two supermarkets' dealings. "Coles rang me out of the blue saying, 'we're setting up a distribution portal, we've calculated that you'll save 0.5% in costs and we're going to charge you 0.7% to use the portal,'" one Coles supplier told us. "We said we didn't need it – we could run a month's worth of stock in a day, and we had never let the supply chain down. We told them to take us off the list, but they wouldn't.

"It was a grab for money, and it was an extraordinary amount. A lot of small suppliers got hit with that."

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

3D print your way to sleep

People with sleep apnoea could soon be sleeping better, with Australia's national science agency the CSIRO partnering with dental company Oventus to create a 3D-printed mouthpiece.

The device allows air to flow through to the back of the throat, avoiding obstructions from the nose, the back of the mouth and tongue. To create the mouthpiece, a patient's mouth is scanned and a blueprint of the mouth developed. The scan is then transformed into a CAD file and can be fed through a 3D printer, which spits out a fitted titanium mouth-guard eight hours later.

The CSIRO says the device has a "duckbill" that extends from the mouth like a whistle and divides into two separate airways. It allows air to flow through to the back of the throat, avoiding obstructions from the nose, back of the mouth and tongue.

According to the CSIRO, the mouthguard is coated in medical-grade plastic, and is comfortable to wear. The existing treatments for sleep apnoea include devices that push the lower jaw forward to open up the airway or, in more severe cases, a face mask that creates a continuous flow of air.

"This new device is tailored to an individual's mouth using a 3D scan and is used only on the top teeth, which make it more compact and far more comfortable," says Oventus CEO Neil Anderson. "The printed mouthpiece bypasses all obstructions by having airways that deliver air to the back of the throat, and it will also stop patients from snoring."

The device is undergoing further trials and should be available to patients next year.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Heat's on Origin

Origin Energy faces Federal Court proceedings for allegedly making false or misleading representations, as well as for engaging in misleading or deceptive conduct, relating to the level of discount customers could receive on their energy usage.

The ACCC alleges that last year, Origin Energy made claims to its SA customers that, under its DailySaver energy plan, they'd receive a discount on the energy charges they would otherwise pay to Origin. But even taking into account the discount, the price would still have been higher than the standard retail price required to be offered by Origin, according to the allegations.

A discount of up to 16% on electricity usage prices was offered by Origin, the ACCC alleges, which was in fact still about four per cent higher than Origin's standard retail contract. And for natural gas, a discount of up to 12% was offered on the DailySaver plan, about one per cent higher than the standard retail contract.

This is the second time the ACCC has begun proceedings against an energy retailer for misleading consumers about the level of discounts available.

JEMMA CASTLE

Traditional Chinese herb reduces arthritis, but...

Plant extract *Tripterygium wilfordii* may be as effective in relieving rheumatoid arthritis symptoms as standard conventional medication methotrexate, a recently published study has found.

The study, which was carried out in China where the herb is used in traditional Chinese medicine, was published in the medical journal *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*. In the study, one group of patients was given *Tripterygium wilfordii*, also known as thunder god vine, a second group was given standard medication methotrexate (brand names Hospira and Methoblastin), and a third group was given both.

The group that took the herb had as much symptom relief as those taking the methotrexate, while those taking both had the greatest relief. All groups suffered side effects, mainly gastrointestinal, such as diarrhoea, and some women suffered menstrual irregularities.

One potential advantage of *Tripterygium wilfordii* over methotrexate is that it may cost less. However, the product used in the trial was a pharmaceutical-grade preparation, so what you buy from your local health food store or online may not be the equivalent of the preparation used in the trial.

The authors of the study also noted that the dose of methotrexate used was much lower than the typical dose used in Western patients. The authors acknowledge that if they had used the higher dose, the results may have been better for the methotrexate group. Other weaknesses of the trial were the relatively short trial period (24 weeks)

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

Handy hygiene

When it comes to washing their hands, doctors are consistently falling below the 70% compliance threshold, according to a new Australian study. It found doctors didn't wash their hands around 35% of the time before touching a patient. But nurses are relative puritans by comparison, with a compliance rate of about 80%.

Study author Professor Mary-Louise McLaws, an infectious diseases expert at the University of NSW, told *The Australian* the problems were a result of the complexity of the five-step handwashing hygiene program introduced in 2009. The process should be simplified, she said, to focus on washing hands before and after seeing each patient, and health workers should be empowered to intervene if they see poor handwashing practices. **MIRANDA HERRON**

CUB fined for misleading beer

Super-sized brewer Carlton United Breweries (CUB) has been fined by the ACCC for one of the most blatant attempts yet to hijack independent Aussie beers. The move follows a CHOICE investigation into big brewers such as SABMiller and Japanese-owned Lion, along with Woolworths, Coles and Coca-Cola Amatil moving in on Aussie craft beers (see *CHOICE*, Feb 14) by mimicking their branding or buying out the smaller brewers.

The brewing giant, owned by UK-based SABMiller and well known for its production of Foster's and Victoria Bitter, last year produced Byron Bay Pale Lager with a map on the bottle showing the location of the brewery nestled behind Byron Bay's Main Beach and Cape Byron lighthouse.

CUB's misleading labelling appears to be designed to take advantage of true-blue beers

But the beer is actually brewed at CUB's doomed Bluetongue brewery, 630km south of Byron.

The misleading labelling used by CUB appears to be designed to take advantage of true-blue beers such as Stone & Wood, which actually is Aussie owned and based in Byron Bay. CUB's Byron Bay Lager, on the other hand, is brewed at its Warnervale brewery, jammed between the Pacific Highway and Warnervale Airport. The true location is a stark contrast to the romanticised story of the "spirit of Byron Bay which has attracted local and international musicians" printed on the back of the Byron Bay Pale Lager bottle.

CUB has provided a court-enforceable undertaking agreeing to cease distribution of the beer with the misleading labelling and to not make false representations of the scale of the brewery in which its products are brewed. **JODI BIRD**

and "open-label" design – the patients knew which preparation they were taking, though the assessors didn't.

This isn't the first study to suggest that *Tripterygium wilfordii* may be an effective treatment for rheumatoid arthritis. The 2009 clinical practice guidelines on managing rheumatoid arthritis for Australian general practitioners note that the herb has been shown in several studies to be effective against RA symptoms. However, they warn that it is associated with numerous serious side effects, including impaired kidney function, haematotoxic (related to blood poisoning) effects, suppressed immune system, hair loss, nausea and diarrhoea. Despite its potential benefits, the guidelines advise doctors against recommending it. **KARINA BRAY**

Heart-warming news on salt

Salt consumption in the UK has fallen by 15% over the past decade and this has been linked to a 40% fall in deaths from heart disease and 42% from stroke over the same period, according to a study published in the *British Medical Journal*.

The study's authors looked at data from more than 31,500 people between 2003 (when public health initiatives to curb salt intake started) and 2011. They found that daily salt intake fell by an average of 1400mg, which was likely to have contributed to a decrease in blood pressure. Other risk factors for cardiovascular disease also fell, including blood cholesterol levels, blood pressure and smoking rates.

The authors warn, however, that despite good progress, 70% of British adults still eat more than the recommended 6000mg of salt per day, with 80% coming from processed foods.

MIRANDA HERRON

Did capsules capture our hearts?

Capsule coffee machines are praised for their convenience and ease of use, and in our testing over the years we've come across some models that rank just as well as manual and semi-automatic machines when it comes to taste. We put the recently released Lavazza Minu and Espressotoria Adesso capsule machines, available from Coles, to the test.

Lavazza Minu

The Lavazza is a manual machine, so it has to be switched off manually at the end of coffee delivery. It's compact and weighs 2.9kg, however its water reservoir only has a 500mL capacity. It can accommodate larger cups easily, but you can't program the amount of coffee delivered into your cup. It takes only 30 seconds to warm up and another 30 seconds to deliver the coffee. The machine will revert to standby mode after nine minutes.

Espressotoria Adesso

The Espressotoria is a semi-automatic machine, so it will switch off automatically once the coffee delivery process is finished. It's a bit bulkier than the Lavazza and weighs 5kg, but its water reservoir has a 1L capacity. It accommodates larger cups, and by simply holding the coffee button you can program the amount of coffee delivered to your desired level. It takes 35 seconds to warm up but only 15 seconds to deliver coffee into your cup, which we think is too fast. The machine reverts to standby mode after five minutes.

FIRST LOOK

The test

We recruited 10 CHOICE staff members to taste the coffee from each machine. In the Lavazza we used the Deciso capsules, and in the Espressotoria the Vittoria Coffee Espresso capsules.

LAVAZZA MINU
PRICE $100
CONTACT store.amodomio.com.au

★★★☆☆

Tasters described the coffee from the Lavazza as strong, slightly bitter and slightly burnt and ranked it OK overall, while they found coffee from the Espressotoria to be watery, bitter, not pleasant and lacking flavour. They ranked it poor overall.

When making four consecutive cups of coffee, the first cup from the Lavazza was much cooler than the following three cups, while consistency in coffee temperature was slightly better with the Espressotoria.

We purchased the optional milk frother for the Espressotoria; it produced froth that's too hard with large air bubbles. The milk was burnt at the bottom of the jug and required effort to remove.

Both these machines are easy to use – simply place the capsule into the group head, turn on the switch or pull the lever down and press a button, and then remove the spent capsule once the coffee is made. The water containers are easy to fill, remove and replace, and while the drip trays are small it's very easy to clean the plastic exteriors of these machines.

CHOICE verdict

If you're thinking of ditching instant coffee and trying out a capsule machine, these ones are readily available at your local supermarket. You can experiment with the range of capsule flavours that are available for each, but when it comes to taste, with the flavours we selected the Lavazza has the edge over the Espressotoria.

REBECCA CIARAMIDARO

ESPRESSOTORIA ADESSO
PRICE $165
CONTACT espressotoria.com

★★½☆☆

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

Unrewarding reward

Credit card reward programs deliver little or nothing to consumers who spend less than $18,000 a year on their card, according to a report published by researchers at Canstar.

At that spending level – the average for Australians – card fees would likely nullify any gains, the research shows. Worse, it's possible to actually lose money on reward-linked cards. If you spend $12,000 a year, for example, you'll only early about $56 worth of cash/voucher rewards, while annual fees on the credit cards reviewed by Canstar range from $50 to as much as $495.

The outlook improves only slightly with higher spending levels and with frequent flyer-type rewards. At $24,000 a year, cardholders would earn a mere $113. At $60,000, you'd be eligible to claim about $284 worth of cash/voucher rewards.

When we looked at reward cards a few years ago, we found consumers would need to spend at least $2000 a month to get any return, while those who spent $1000 a month or less would pay more in annual fees than they get back in rewards. Converting the points into goods can be particularly unrewarding, we found. If you spent $1000 a month it would take about five-and-a-half years to earn the points equivalent to a digital camera worth $500. And you would need to spend at least $6600 on an average card to earn enough points for a $50 toaster.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

ASIC stings Virgin Money

Virgin Money (Australia) has paid three fines totalling $30,600 after the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) issued the company with infringement notices for misleading online and television advertising for its so-called "Quick & Easy" life insurance.

ASIC says consumers were misled about the process involved in applying for the life insurance policy and the cover provided. According to the regulator, Virgin Money's advertising stated that "no health or lifestyle questions" would be asked. But the application form did indeed ask such questions, including smoking status. Responses were then used to calculate life insurance premiums.

The ads also stated that the weight of the person applying for the insurance would not be a factor affecting the coverage but in fact weight could be a relevant factor under the Quick & Easy policy. The misleading advertisements appeared on television and online.

"Purchasing life insurance is an important decision and consumers should be able to confidently rely on representations made to them in advertising," said ASIC deputy chairman Peter Kell.

CHOICE has found life insurance products directly promoted to consumers can be the most expensive way to insure. Our most recent review found life insurance with your super fund costs less compared with that offered by financial advisers or your bank (see *CHOICE*, Oct 13).

UTA MIHM

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and we regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

Beating the lazy tax

Our home and contents insurance renewal arrived last week from Apia for $664. It had gone up $90 since last year, and on checking we found that last year's rise was $100 on the previous amount. This year they also included cover for tsunami.

We've been with Apia for years and have never made a claim, so I phoned them about the excessive rise in premiums. The company representative said claims had gone up considerably and so on. So I told them I'd phone around and get a better deal, as per CHOICE's advice, and straight away was told that as a good long-standing customer, they'd reduce the premium to $611.

Thanks CHOICE!

Dave Kitchener, Eaglehawk Neck, Tas

The Direct approach

My dog died earlier this year, and I would like to share my positive experience with insurer Vet-N-Pet Direct.

I had been a customer for about three years, spending $100-300 a year for meds for a cat and dog. In December, I bought a six-month supply of heartworm and flea treatment for $95.55 + $5.95 delivery; the parcel arrived within three days. My dog passed away in early January, well after the seven days return terms had expired.

I contacted Vet-N-Pet Direct explaining that the product was unused. They offered a return and refund straight away. They even emailed me a free return sticker, and within a few days I had the full amount refunded to my credit card, no return postage or restocking fee. Their understanding of my loss made the whole procedure so much easier.

I would like to spread the word about a company that has exceeded my expectations and their duties and hope to encourage other consumers to just ask, even if the published return and refund policies don't cover their situation.

Regina Villari Kohlert, Epping, NSW

Inking fund

I refer to your recent story on printers (*CHOICE*, May 14). As the article correctly notes, inkjet printers are often incredibly inexpensive and the suppliers make up for this by charging extremely high prices for the ink cartridges.

However, it is possible to have the best of both worlds by purchasing cartridges online where they are often quite inexpensive. I have been doing this for some time and have not had quality issues (despite the warnings given by the printer manufacturers).

Philip Roberts, Coledale, NSW

CHOICE SAYS *It's fantastic that you've chosen a printer that allows you to use cartridges sourced from overseas. However, the printer manufacturers spend a lot of money developing the chipsets in their cartridges and printers to ensure your experience, sadly, is an unusual one. Most of the technology in the cartridge ensures you face difficulties not only using an OEM (original equipment manufacturer) cartridge but also when using a cartridge made by the printer company but produced in another country. The manufacturers argue they're protecting the returns in profit that they need for all the research and development they carry out in developing the ink.*

If you've had the printer for a while and don't want to continue paying the exorbitant prices for your replacement cartridges, give the overseas online retailer a go. Just keep in mind that if anything goes wrong as a result, you may have difficulty getting the local printer company to deal with your model.

"Trying to figure out what the exit fees are for different contracts is a very difficult process"

Debts from beyond the grave

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Retirement homes in Perth charge residents the same weekly fee after they've died until the unit has been sold or tenanted. This can sometimes take years as the retirement homes don't care if they fill the position.

Recently this regulation has changed to a maximum of six months, but I bet many homes in WA won't let residents know this. How do the other states compare? You had plenty of people complain about pet insurance being paid after their pet's death. What about the poor families who have to pay out large amounts of money after a relative dies?

Jennifer Maynard, Perth, WA

CHOICE SAYS *A few years ago we did a story on retirement villages –* ***choice.com.au/retirementvillages*** *Retirement village contracts are very complicated, and trying to figure out what the exit fees are for different contracts is a very difficult process. The worst case we have heard of is where the estate of a resident received their exit entitlements eight years later!*

States and territories are changing laws around retirement villages, but each one is different. Some states are reducing the maximum periods when exit fees will be charged; others also require a contract disclosure statement. The main thing is to be careful when signing up and get some legal and financial advice.

Contact us!

Email us at **yoursay@choice.com.au** or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Thumbs

I bought a Griffin Survivor Case for my iPad about 18 months ago and the multi-position work stand broke. I asked Griffin if I could purchase a replacement stand; they offered to send me one for free as a one-time courtesy. Thumbs up to Griffin for going above and beyond the call of duty.

Ross & Lesley Hedley, Singleton, WA

Our son has been staying with us and had to return to the UK for a few weeks. When he tried to open his (fairly new) suitcase, the lock wouldn't undo. We managed to get a locksmith to open it, but were still left with a potentially useless UK-bought newish suitcase. I worked out how to remove the lock and emailed Samsonite in Victoria. They replied almost instantly asking for a photo and were quickly able to tell me that the lock is a type not sold in Australia, but that they did have a few spares of it in stock. They posted the lock to me, all free of charge, and my son now has a good-as-new suitcase!

Bob Searle, Fremantle, WA

I recently bought a top from Ezibuy.com.au. I wore it once and washed it only to discover it was badly made – the seams and hem were very uneven and puckered. I emailed Ezibuy, who replied straight away apologising for the faulty garment and asking if I would like a refund or exchange, and to return it postage paid. As I had worn and washed it I was not expecting such a positive response.

Jane Greig, Yorkeys Knob, Qld

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

Top tips

Should you get private hospital insurance, and if so which policy is the best value? **Jodi Bird** and **Uta Mihm** find out

A $7 fee for seeing a doctor, an increase in the Medicare Levy, a $5 increase in Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) prescriptions, a 6.2% increase in the average cost of health insurance, and a diminishing private health insurance rebate. These are just some of the Abbott government's solutions to plugging up the financial holes in our national health system – and in almost all cases they'll directly be hitting your wallet.

So with less change in your pocket, how can you get the best value hospital insurance?

Option one: Public hospital

All Australians, including permanent residents, already have hospital insurance. It's called Medicare, and it entitles you to free or subsidised treatment in a public hospital. If you have an accident or are seriously ill, chances are you'll go to a public hospital regardless of whether you have private hospital insurance or not, because they have the resources to deal with the most complex and expensive medical cases.

But the government doesn't like us using the public hospital system too much, so there is a range of financial incentives in place to coax us into the private system. And, the waiting lists for some types of elective surgery in the public system are further encouragement to go private.

Option two: Private hospital

If you're reading this you've probably already decided on going private. Some of the advantages of private health insurance include:

- Jumping the waiting lists for elective surgery.
- Choosing your own doctor.
- Going to a private hospital (which generally have better conditions and service than public hospitals).
- If you're a single person earning over $90,000 or a couple or family earning over $180,000 in the 2014-15 financial year and you have private hospital

Non-obstetrics cover

Our recommendations are for medium-level cover with a maximum excess of $1000 that includes full private hospital cover for almost all treatments other than pregnancy, birth and related treatments.

NON-OBSTETRICS COVER BEST BUYS – $1000 EXCESS WITHOUT PREGNANCY

Fund & policy	Score (%)	Monthly premiums ($, family or couple)							Excess ($)	Co-payment ($)
		ACT/NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA		
Aust Unity Gold Hospital	76 (WA 71)	316	215	333		334	351	268	1000	0
GMHBA Gold Hosp (No preg) Gap Sav	71	334 (A)		339				246	1000	0
NIB Top Hospital No Preg	67	318	244	316	253	302	327	248	1000	0

insurance, you don't have to pay the Medicare Levy Surcharge (MLS).

- If you've had private health insurance since 1 July 2000 or 1 July following your 31st birthday (or were born before 1 July 1934), you don't pay the Lifetime Health Cover (LHC) loading on private health insurance.
- If you're a single person earning $140,000 a year or less or a couple or family earning $280,000 or less, the government subsidises your private hospital and extras insurance in the form of a rebate.

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

What kind of hospital insurance do you need?

To answer this question you should first ask yourself: why do you want it? If you just want to avoid paying extra tax (the MLS), then go for the least expensive cover.

Basic cover policies are a good fit for avoiding tax but little use if you actually want to use them, as they commonly restrict cover to public hospital only or exclude a long list of treatments such as:

- Assisted reproduction and IVF
- Pregnancy and birth-related care
- Cataract and eye lens surgery
- Cardiac and cardiac-related services
- Non-cosmetic plastic surgery
- Dialysis for chronic renal failure
- Gastric banding and obesity surgery
- Hip, knee and other joint replacements
- Palliative care
- Psychiatric care
- Rehabilitation
- Sterilisation

Some basic policies are called **public hospital policies** as they only cover treatments in a public hospital. It means you can't jump the waiting list, but you can choose your own doctor and possibly get preference for a private room.

Keep an eye out for our basic cover policy recommendations in the next issue of *CHOICE*.

Medium cover If you mainly want hospital insurance for tax reasons but also think you may still want to use it, then consider medium-level cover. But make sure you peruse the policy features carefully, because these policies may still exclude or limit treatments such as:

- Pregnancy and birth-related care
- Assisted reproduction and IVF
- Cataract and eye lens procedures
- Hip, knee and other joint replacements
- Dialysis for chronic renal failure
- Sterilisation

Cover that only excludes pregnancy, birth and related treatments could be a good choice for singles or more mature people. So if this is you, check out our non-obstetrics best buy policies (see below).

Top cover these are the best-value policies if you want to be fully protected.

- They cover all treatments in a private hospital.
- The premiums are top shelf, but if you take out a policy with an excess and/or co-payments they're often not much more expensive than medium cover.

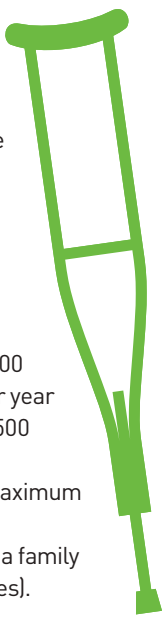
No excess for			Good gap cover	Ambulance cover*	Pregnancy	IVF	Full cover for all other services	Premium discounts	Contact
Kids	Day surgery	Accident							
✓			✓	✓	×	×	(C)	Prepay & direct debit	australianunity.com.au/
✓				(B)	×	×	✓	Direct debit	gmhba.com.au
				✓	×	×	(D)	Direct debit	nib.com.au

USING THE TABLES Where there is no premium listed for a particular state the policy may still be available, but it is not a best buy. Prices are for families and do not include the private health insurance rebate (see page 20 to see if you're eligible). Couple premiums are the same as family premiums and singles pay half.

TABLE NOTES (A) This policy is not a best buy in the ACT as the gap score is more than 25 percentage points below the industry average. **(B)** No ambulance cover in NT, SA, Victoria or WA, but funds may cover ambulance through their extras policies. **(C)** Sterilisation reversal is not covered. **(D)** Infertility investigations are also not covered.

Top cover with excess

If you want to be fully protected just in case but don't expect to use your hospital cover over the next few years, then try **top cover with excess.** Some of these policies have a waiting time of up to two years – called a benefit limitation period, or BLP – for full cover for some treatments if you haven't been covered for them in the past, but after that you're fully protected. We don't include policies with BLPs on cardiac and related cover, non-cosmetic plastic surgery, rehabilitation and palliative care or psychiatric services, as we consider these important. We've included at least one recommendation with ambulance cover in each state.



- **Top cover $1000** with a maximum excess of $1000 and/or a co-payment per year for a family or couple ($500 excess for singles).
- **Top cover $500** with a maximum excess of $500 and/or a co-payment per year for a family or couple ($250 for singles).

TOP COVER BEST BUYS – $1000 EXCESS

Fund & policy	Score (%)	Monthly premiums ($, family or couple)							Excess ($)
		ACT/NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	
AHM Top Hospital	94, (WA 89)		164					297	1000
Australian Unity Comprehensive Hospital (K4)	91							311	500
Bupa Top Hospital	81		159						1000
GMF Complete Hospital	93					278			1000
HCF Top Plus only	95				281				900
Health Partners Silver Hospital	87	246		246	246	246	246		1000
HIF Gold Hospital	88	253		259		259	259		800
Peoplecare Private Hospital	92						311		1000

TOP COVER BEST BUYS – $500 EXCESS

Fund & policy	Score (%)	Monthly premiums ($, family or couple)							Excess ($)	Co-payment ($)
		ACT/NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA		
Aust Unity Comprehensive (K4)	91							311	500	0
Bupa Top Hospital	85	339	194					303	500	0
HBF Top Hospital	91					341			500	0
HIF Gold Hospital	92-93 (WA 88)	295		300	295	300	300	268	400	70/day, private
NIB Top Hospital	84				318				500	0
Peoplecare Private Hospital	96			349			349		500	0
Qld Country Top Hospital	94			333					500	0

Top cover with no excess

If you're at a stage of your life when you think you might need to go to hospital within the next few years, then you'll want **top cover with no excess**. Our best buys here have:

- Nil excess.
- Above-average gap cover.
- No BLPs.
- Ambulance cover for the states in which they're recommended.

As with all hospital policies, a 12-month waiting period applies for all pre-existing conditions. So make sure you upgrade your cover in good time, for example if you're planning a family or think you may need elective surgery.

TOP COVER BEST BUYS – $0 EXCESS

Fund & policy	Score (%)	Monthly premiums ($, family or couple)							Excess ($)	Co-payment ($)
		ACT/NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA		
AHM Top Hospital	100		264						0	0
CUA Private Hospital 100%	100	382							0	0
GMF Complete Hospital	100 (WA 95)	375				356		314	0	0
HBF Top Hospital	100							383	0	0
HCF Top Plus Only	100 (WA 95)				334		396	341	0	0
Health Partners Gold Hospital	100	366			366	366	366		0	0
HIF GoldStar Hospital	100			398					0	0
Medibank Top Hospital	100 (WA 95)	381	236					342	0	0
Peoplecare Private Hospital	100			387		387	387		0	0
Westfund Platinum Hospital	100	374		374		374			0	0

Co-payment ($)	No excess for			Good gap cover	Ambulance cover*	Full cover in private hospital	Premium discounts	Contact
	Kids	Day surgery	Accident					
0	✓		✓	✓(A)	✓	✓		ahm.com.au
0				✓(A)	✓	✓	Prepay & direct debit	australianunity.com.au
0	✓				✓	✓		bupa.com.au
0		✓		✓	✓(C)	✓	Prepay	gmfhealth.com.au
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		hcf.com.au
50/day, $500 yr				✓	✓	✓	Direct debit	healthpartners.com.au
70/day private room		✓		✓		✓	Prepay	hif.com.au
0				✓	✓	✓		peoplecare.com.au

No excess for			Good gap cover	Ambulance cover*	Full cover in private hospital	Premium discounts	Contact
Kids	Day surgery	Accident					
			✓(A)	✓	✓	Prepay & direct debit	australianunity.com.au
✓				✓	✓		bupa.com.au
✓	✓			(C)	✓	Prepay & direct debit	hbf.com.au
✓	✓		✓(A)	(B)	✓	Prepay	hif.com.au
				✓	✓	Direct debit	nib.com.au
			✓	✓	✓		peoplecare.com.au
			✓	(B)	(D)		qldcountryhealth.com.au

No excess for			Good gap cover	Ambulance cover*	Full cover in private hospital	Premium discounts	Contact
Kids	Day surgery	Accident					
na	na	na	✓	✓	✓		ahm.com.au
na	na	na	✓	(B)	✓		cuahealth.com.au
na	na	na	✓(A)	(C)	✓	Prepay	gmfhealth.com.au
na	na	na	✓	(C)	✓	Prepay & direct debit	hbf.com.au
na	na	na	✓(A)	✓	✓		hcf.com.au
na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	Direct debit	healthpartners.com.au
na	na	na	✓	(B)	✓	Prepay	hif.com.au
na	na	na	✓(A)	✓	✓		medibank.com.au
na	na	na	✓	✓	✓		peoplecare.com.au
na	na	na	✓	✓	✓		westfund.com.au

TABLE NOTES * Emergency ambulance cover. Some funds also cover non-emergency ambulance, check with the fund for details. Ambulance cover in ACT, NSW, TAS and Qld is provided by the state government – see page 20. **(A)** Known-gap cover less than industry average in WA. **(B)** No ambulance cover in the following states NT, SA, VIC, WA, but funds may cover ambulance through their extras policies. **(C)** No cover for air ambulance. **(D)** Hip and knee replacements and gastric banding restricted to cover in a public hospital for the first 24 months if you take out cover for the first time. **na** Not applicable.

EXCESSES & CO-PAYMENTS

By choosing an excess or co-payment, you can save on your health insurance premiums.

An **excess** is an expense you pay out of your own pocket once per hospital stay.

- Be sure to check how many times the excess applies per year and per family.
- Some policies don't charge an excess for children, for a day stay or for treatment after an accident.
- The highest excess you can choose without becoming liable for the Medicare Levy Surcharge is $500 per year for singles and $1000 per year for couples and families, but there is no restriction on co-payments.

A **co-payment** usually applies once per day for a specified number of days, such as five days per hospital stay.

- Some co-payments have a yearly cap such as $500 or only apply for a private room.
- Check how many times the co-payment applies per year.

Need to know

Hospital gap payments

If you're going into hospital, check your health fund has a gap agreement with that hospital before you go in or you could be liable for the kind of accommodation costs that celebrities pay for penthouses.

Medical gap payments

Speaking of exorbitant costs, your first foray as a private patient, in a private or public hospital, will likely be welcomed by the confusing and potentially costly world of medical gap payments.

Under private hospital insurance, the government pays 75% of the Medicare Benefits Schedule Fee for each "item" that your doctor intends to charge for, and your insurer pays the remaining 25%. However, doctors aren't bound by the Medicare schedule fee, so they can and often do charge higher. The amount that doctors charge above the fee is known as the "medical gap".

Some doctors have agreements with health funds to cover this gap. If your doctor recovers the entire medical gap from your health fund it's a "no gap" agreement. Otherwise, if the doctor recovers some of the medical gap from the health fund and the rest from you, this is a "known gap" agreement.

- No gap = good
- Known gap = not so good, but at least your health funds covers more than the 25% and you know how much you're paying

Medical gaps can cost you up to thousands of dollars, so make sure you find out if you're liable for a gap fee. The recommended top policies with $0 excess in our review (see page 18) have above-average coverage of no-gap agreements with doctors in that state.

Suspending your membership

Your health fund may allow you to suspend your membership if, for example, you go overseas or become unemployed.

- In this case you don't pay a premium and are not covered.
- But your LHC rating stays in place, so you won't have to pay a surcharge later on when you can afford to take up hospital cover again.
- The MLS can still apply depending on your income.

If your fund does not allow you to suspend your membership you can use your LHC's "days of absence", which allows a maximum of 1094 days (three years minus one day) of no hospital cover without affecting your LHC.

Cheap health cover for members

Check whether you qualify to join a restricted membership fund, which are available only to people who, for example, work in the education or defence industry. They often offer good policies at a lower premium than open membership funds, especially if you're after top cover with no excess.

Family cover

Family cover generally includes your partner and children under a certain age. The age varies from fund to fund – it could be anywhere from 16 up to 23. Some policies may include full-time students under 25 or other dependants. Check whether an extra charge applies.

Switching & waiting periods

If you switch to hospital cover that's considered equivalent or lower than your existing policy (check with the fund), the waiting period you served on your previous policy will be carried across.

Ambulance cover

Ambulance expenses are not covered by Medicare, and the extent of coverage by state governments varies. By definition you can't predict if or when you're going to need an ambulance, so it's worth making sure you're covered.

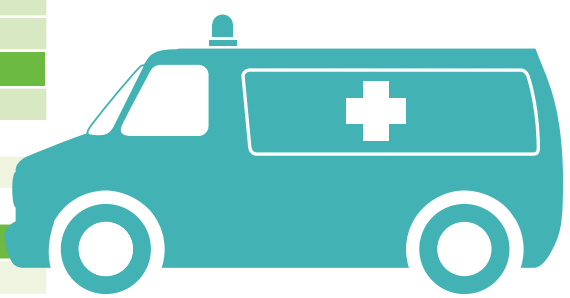
- Queensland and Tasmanian residents are covered by their state government.
- NT, SA, Victorian and WA residents can purchase insurance through a private health fund or subscribe to the state ambulance service.
- NSW and ACT residents can purchase ambulance insurance through a private health fund.

Ambulance cover is sometimes included with hospital and sometimes with extras, so if you take out health insurance check to ensure you have it.

Check with your health fund to see what kind of ambulance cover is provided. Some funds only cover ground transport, excluding air ambulance for example. ■

PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE REBATE (2014/15 – 2017/18)

PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE REBATE & MLS INCOME THRESHOLDS				
Singles	**≤$90,000**	**$90,001-105,000**	**$105,001-140,000**	**≥$140,001**
Families	**≤$180,000**	**$180,001-210,000**	**$210,001-280,000**	**≥$280,001**
REBATE				
	Standard	**Tier 1**	**Tier 2**	**Tier 3**
< Age 65	29.04%	19.36%	9.68%	0%
Age 65-69	33.88%	24.20%	14.52%	0%
Age 70+	38.72%	29.04%	19.36%	0%
MEDICARE LEVY SURCHARGE				
All ages	0.00%	1.00%	1.25%	1.50%



Snack attack

Miranda Herron analyses more than 260 lunch box snacks and finds most fall short in the nutrition stakes

In a perfect world, all kids would have nutritionally sound lunch boxes. In reality, however, creating lunch boxes can be fraught with negotiation, compromise, foot stamping and possibly tears.

While most parents want a balanced lunch box, it has also become the norm to include some kind of processed treat. These may seem relatively benign, but the problem with regularly including these foods is that they tend to be high in unhelpful nutrients like sugar and sodium and displace other healthier alternatives such as veggies or fruit.

A 2010 study of NSW schoolchildren found that while 96 per cent of primary schoolkids ate their suggested one serve of fruit per day, only one third of children in years 4-6 ate the recommended serves of vegetables each day.

"It's unlikely that kids would be able to eat the all their daily veggies in an evening meal, so adding a couple of serves to a lunchbox is a good start," argues nutritionist Mandy dos Santos from Little People Nutrition.

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating advises limiting what it calls "discretionary foods" – the nutrient-poor and energy-dense ones. And, says dos Santos, parents should be trying to get kids to eat the suggested serves of core foods (lean meat and fish, dairy, grains, veggies and fruit) each day before offering non-core treats.

HOW LUNCH BOX SNACKS COMPARE

We analysed more than 265 snacks using the Health Star Rating calculator (see page 24). The results were underwhelming – only three items received five stars: The Laughing Cow Light and two flavours of Tuckers Snack Bites (left). More than half the products earned 2½ or less stars, and only 21% earned four or more stars, most of which were fruit-based snacks such as sultanas. All nutritional comparisons are per 100g.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

The Laughing Cow Cheez Dippers 1230kj, 9.5g sat fat

Cheese & crackers

The presence of calcium in cheese may lure parents into thinking a small box of crackers and processed cheese dip is a healthy snack. However, almost all the products we looked at in this category at earned just one star, with only **The Laughing Cow Cheez Dippers** gaining ★½.

Many products didn't even list calcium on the nutritional information panel (NIP), and although some cheese dips (Kraft, Uncle Tobys) do offer a reasonable amount of calcium, all products have very high saturated fat, salt and kilojoules.

For a better dairy snack, ditch the biscuits and cheese "dip" or "spread" and opt for a cheese stick or triangle. such as Laughing Cow light wedges, which was the only brand that earned five stars. Compare calcium levels and keep an eye out for sodium levels, as they can vary widely between similar-looking products.

★

Cowbelle (Aldi) Cheese Rockets
1600mg sodium

★★

Kraft Strip Cheese
1100mg sodium

Savoury crunchy snacks

Of the 36 savoury, crunchy snacks we looked at, 28 ranged between half a star and two stars.

½★

Top 20 variety pack (Cheezels)
2220kJ, 14.9g sat fat, 1200mg sodium, 1g fibre

★½

Mamee Noodle Snack 2040kJ, 5.3g sat fat, 750mg sodium, (no listing for fibre)

★★½

Ajitas Vege Chips Sweet & Sour
1890kJ, 1.6 sat fat, 670mg sodium, 5.4g fibre

★★★½

Smith's Grain Waves Sour Cream and Chives 2000kJ, 2.5g sat fat, 389mg sodium, 6g fibre

Although **Arnott's Shapes Under the Sea (Cheddar)** gets ★★★★ (medium saturated fat and 9.1g fibre), **the variety pack with traditional flavours BBQ, Pizza, Cheddar and Cheese and Bacon Shapes** is high in saturated fat, only gets ★½ and, unlike the Shapes Under the Sea, does not list fibre content.

Ranging from ★★ - ★★★, rice-based crackers such as **Rice Wheels** are slightly better than chips as they tend to have fewer kilojoules and low saturated fat. but they don't have much fibre and are also fairly high in sodium.

For something crunchy, a better choice is popcorn. The pre-packaged ready-to-eat variety generally falls between ★★★ and ★★★★. **Sunbites Lightly Salted** popcorn with its 18.5g of fibre, gets ★★★★½. That said, it's wise to check the label to see if you are really buying popcorn. **Smith's Air Popped Potato Snacks** packaging, for example, looks very similar to Sunbite popcorn but is made with potato rather than corn and only gets ★★½.

Tuckers Natural Snack Bites Onion & Cheddar 1650kJ, 3.8g sat fat, 420mg sodium, 20.1g fibre

Fruit snacks

Just because a fruit snack package trumpets words such as "65% fruit juice", "made with real fruit" or even "100% fruit", doesn't mean it should replace real fruit. Usually made with a mixture of dried fruit and/ or puree, the sugar is concentrated to levels around 50% in strips, compared with a fresh apple that has about 12% sugar.

Uncle Tobys Roll-Ups (★★½) may have "no artificial colours or flavours", but this doesn't mean they're pure fruit. Look at the ingredients list and you'll see maltodextrin is the largest ingredient, followed by about 30% concentrated fruit puree, plus sugar, starch, sunflower oil and vegetable gums.

Nice & Natural Fruit Strings Strawberry, Raspberry and Blueberry (★★) is 62% reconstituted apple juice and three per cent berries. The other 35% contains glucose syrup and sugar among other things, but also

Bega Stringers Original 700mg sodium

beef gelatine and beeswax!

Non-fruit ingredients can also up the kilojoule content compared with strips with more fruit.

★ **Go Natural Berry Frugo's** (with "yoghurt flavour") 2037kJ per 100g

★★★★ **Annies 100% Natural Fruit Leather Apricot and Apple** 1010kJ per 100g

Some of these snacks have more fibre than others. Anything above 6g per 100g is considered high fibre, and good choices are **SVA 100% True Fruit** or **Golden Days Fruit Poles**, which have between 9g and 12g of fibre.

Dried fruit snacks can be a better option than most fruit sticks, though they still have significantly more sugar than fresh fruit. There can be big differences in the sugar content of different dried fruits, with sultanas having almost twice as much sugar as dried apricots. The **sultanas** rated around ★★★ – the **Coles Sultana and Apricot** came out with ★★★★½.

Tubs of fruit pieces are a handy sweet snack for kids, and all the brands we looked at have at least ★★★. However, the **Goulburn Valley Diced Fruit** range rates ★★★★ because the fruit is in juice rather than jelly or syrup and has no added sugar.

Fruit pouches also averaged ★★★, but the products that came out with ★★★★ such as **Whole Kids Frooshie**, **Rafferty's Garden LB1** and **SPC Crush Ups** were almost entirely fruit compared with **SPC Fruity Jellys**, which was only 10% fruit.

Grain-based bars

There are two types of grain-based bars – those that position themselves as healthy with names such as "oats and honey", "cereal bites" and "muesli bars", and those that don't try as hard to look healthy using words like "puffs", "bubble bars" and "choc rainbow".

When it comes to the "healthier" bars, some may not be as healthy as they seem. **Mother Earth Baked Oaty Slices** boasts wholegrain cereals on the package and does have 4.5g fibre, but only gets ★ in part because of the high 13.5g saturated fat.

★★ **Uncle Toby's Oat Slice Apple Cinnamon** 5g fibre, 7.9g sat fat

★★★½ **Nestle Milo Oatie Bar** 5.8g fibre, 2.2 sat fat

★★★★ **Be Natural Berry** 11.6g fibre, 1.4g sat fat

★★★★ **Freedom Foods Chewy Apple & Cinnamon Bars** 6.9g fibre, 1.3g sat fat

★★★★ **Carman's Original Fruit-Free Muesli Bars** 7.1g fibre, 2.1g sat fat

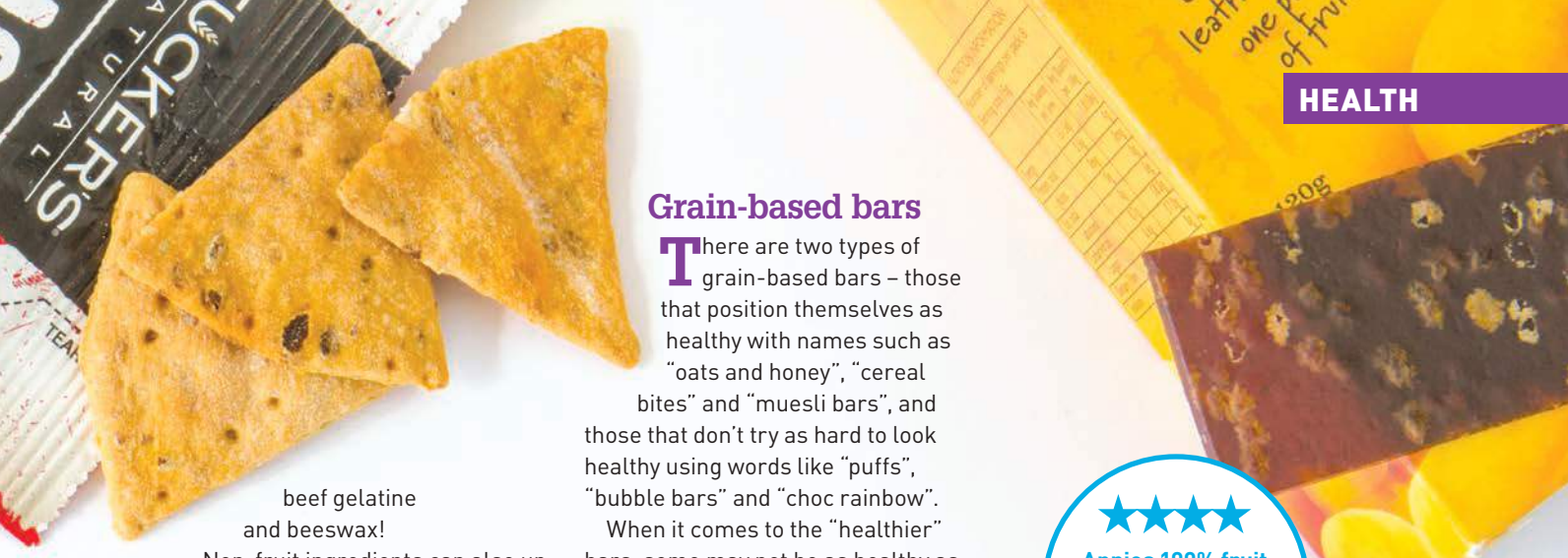
★★★★½ **Kez's Gluten Free Cereal Bites** 11.4g fibre, 0.2 sat fat

As you'd expect highly processed **"puff" snack bars** don't rate as highly. But if you are looking to buy them, there is quite a difference between some of the products when it comes to fibre and sugar, so it pays to compare nutritional panels.

★ **Kellogg's LCMs Split Stix Banana Choc** 38.1g sugar, 0.9g fibre

★★★ **Hillcrest (Aldi) Bubble Bars Choc Rainbow** 27.1g sugar, 11.3g fibre

In the same realm as muesli bars, **Kellog's K-Time Twists** (★★½) are fruit snack bars that have a fruit filling encased in biscuit. They are definitely treat foods but tend to be lower in kilojoules, saturated fat and sodium than the LCM-style bars. Their fibre content is also higher, which helps push their star rating above two stars.



★★★★
Annies 100% fruit leather apricot and apple
1010kJ per 100g

★★★★½
Kez's Gluten Free Cereal Bites
11.4g fibre,
0.2g sat fat

The **Woolworths Select Fruit Bars** are similar to K-Time twists rate ★★★★, with six per cent wholegrains.

Sweet biscuits

Made predominantly with flour, sugar and oil, not surprisingly there is little to recommend in these bikkies. Only one product earned more than two stars, **Coles Koala & Friends** (★★½).

ALL COMPARISONS ARE PER 100G

The balanced lunch box

Is your child's lunch box as healthy as it could be?

"It's unrealistic to expect parents will achieve a perfectly balanced lunch box every time, but it is possible to make gradual improvements over time," says dos Santos.

Protein

One serve of lean protein (meat, dairy, eggs, nuts, seeds) is 100g. But as kids only need one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half serves per day, they don't need to have a whole serve at lunch, says dos Santos. Don't forget plant proteins in the form of baked beans or dips made with legumes such as hummus, tofu and seeds. (Nuts are also great, but many schools have a no-nut policy.)

Grains

Found in bread, wraps, rice, muesli and crackers, grains provide fibre and carbohydrates for energy. Look for wholegrains with around 6g of fibre per serve, although 4g is still considered a good source of fibre. Choose wholegrain (or wholemeal with added grains) bread rather than multigrain and aim for 4-5 serves a day for primary school kids.

A serve of grains is: One slice of bread, ½ cup cooked rice or noodles.

Fruit

A source of fibre, vitamins and minerals, kids should have one or two pieces of fruit per day.

A serve of fruit is: One piece of medium sized-fruit, one cup cooked, canned or diced fruit, 30g dried fruit. Half a cup (125ml) of 100% fruit juice is also considered one serve, but should only be used occasionally.

Vegetables

Kids should be eating 1½-2 serves per day. Try chopped veggies such as carrot and cucumber.

A serve of veggies is: half cup veggies, one cup raw leafy greens or one cup starchy veggies (sweet corn).

Dairy

Offering calcium as well as protein. Primary-aged kids need 1½-3 serves a day. Choose low-fat dairy, and for yoghurt check the sugars – look for less than 12g per 100g.

A serve of dairy is: Three-quarter cup of yoghurt, one cup of low-fat milk or two slices of cheese (40g)

What is a serve of discretionary food?

A serve should contain no more than 600kJ and includes:

Sweet: 40g of lollies, 25g chocolate, one small doughnut, one small slice of cake or muffin, two to three sweet biscuits, 60g honey (about 2tbsp), two scoops of regular ice cream or a 375ml can of soft drink.

Savoury: 30g salty crackers or two slices of processed meats, two thin sausages, one-third (60g) commercial meat pie or 12 (60g) hot chips.

Using the 100g column of the nutritional panel is the best way to compare products at the supermarket, when looking at kids snacks' it's also important to check the serving size of individual packets. For discretionary foods or treats, the smaller the serving size, the better.

WHAT ARE HEALTH STAR RATINGS?

The Health Star Rating is a voluntary scheme developed by consumer, health and industry groups in a government-led process. Participating companies apply a rating between ½ and five stars to the front of food products, giving consumers at-a-glance information. The rating is based on the product's kilojoules, saturated fat, sugars, sodium, protein and fibre in 100g/mL, and fruit, vegetable, nut or legume content. The scheme also includes information about key nutrients. CHOICE used the information available on the products we rated to estimate star ratings as best we could. Companies aren't required to declare fibre or the percentage of fruit, vegetables, nuts and legumes. Some products didn't declare some or all of this information, and the correct rating may be higher with the full info considered.

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Brekkie blitz

We know breakfast is important, but is it possible to get both a nutritious and quick start to the day? **Zoya Sheftalovich** checks out the options

Breakfast. We're constantly told it's vital for maintaining concentration throughout the day and keeping a healthy lifestyle. Whole supermarket aisles are devoted to its many and various forms. And studies have shown the health risks associated with skipping breakfast (see opposite).

While the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) says all Australians should be encouraged to start the day with a healthy breakfast, the reality is that, in many cases, this just isn't happening. And some clever marketers have pounced on the breakfast-on-the-go bandwagon, releasing several new products designed to make the first meal of the day easy. But just how do they stack up?

Breakfast biscuits

Several new breakfast biscuit products have hit the shelves of late. belVita Breakfast biscuits are, if the marketing is to be believed, "specially designed for breakfast". The company trumpets the health credentials of the bikkies, claiming they're made with five wholegrains, have low GI and are a source of fibre. But when CHOICE put the belVitas through the Health Star Rating calculator (see below), they rated between two and two-and-a-half stars. Additionally, all are high in sugar, and all have a medium amount of saturated fat and sodium.

On their own, the biscuits aren't that great. belVita does recommend (albeit in very fine print) that rather than a standalone product, the bikkies should be paired with a glass of low-fat milk.

Aldi's Brekki Bikkies are a similar product to the belVita. Both the fruit and fibre, and milk and cereal varieties scored two-and-a-half stars in the Health Star Rating calculator. They have medium levels of saturated fat, sodium and sugar.

Chia pods

The Chia Co.'s Chia Pods are also marketed as a healthy on-the-go breakfast. Their fibre credentials are relatively solid – one tub of the banana flavour contains 21% of your daily fibre recommendation, the mango 22% and the vanilla bean 17%. When it comes to health star ratings, they each earn three-and-a-half stars. What's more the pods are low in sodium, and the fruit varieties we looked at have just three ingredients: coconut milk, fruit and chia, while the vanilla flavour contains coconut milk, vanilla, cinnamon and chia.

What is the Health Star Rating?

The Health Star Rating is a voluntary scheme developed by consumer, health and industry groups in a government-led process. Participating companies apply a rating of between ½ and five stars to the front of food products, giving consumers at-a-glance information. The rating is based on the kilojoules, saturated fat, sugars, sodium, protein and fibre in 100g/mL of the product, and fruit, vegetable, nut or legume content. The scheme also includes information about key nutrients.

Liquid Breakfast

For those who prefer their breakfast in popper form, liquid breakfast drinks can be an appealing option. But before heading down that aisle, check out choice.com.au/liquidbreakfasts for CHOICE's review of 23 products across six brands, looking at their ingredients, nutrients and sometimes-unfounded claims.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BREAKFAST

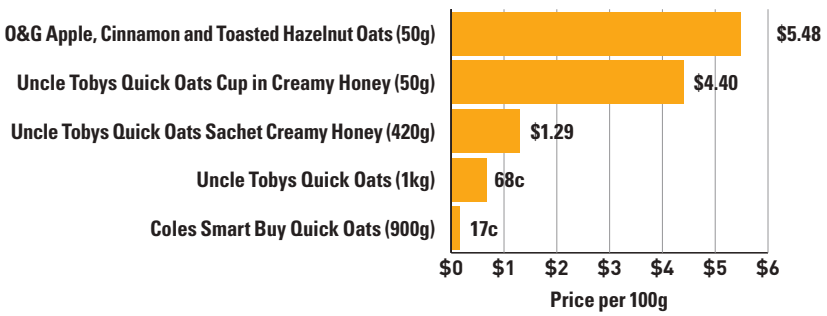
The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) says breakfast helps you maintain a healthy weight. "Breakfast fills you up, meaning you are less likely to experience hunger pangs throughout the day and resort to snacking on high-energy, high-fat foods." It also "provides energy and leads to higher intakes of essential nutrients such as carbohydrate, dietary fibre and certain vitamins and minerals", and "eating breakfast has been linked with an improvement in literacy and numeracy skills in school children".

The DAA says it is important to eat something nutritious each morning to replenish your carbohydrate stores and refuel for the day ahead. Those who have breakfast are more likely to meet their recommended dietary intakes for vitamins and minerals compared to those who don't.

Convenience at a cost

Oats are recommended by the DAA as a healthy breakfast food, and there are plenty of incarnations. So how do you choose between rolled oats, quick oats, oat sachets and the newest in oat innovation, oat single-serve cups?

The convenience factor of oat cups is clear – all you need to do is peel back the lid, add water or milk and pop it into the microwave. But convenience comes at a cost. A single-serve cup of Uncle Tobys Creamy Honey Quick Oats costs $4.40 per 100g ($2.20 per pack of 50g) at Coles Online. Provide your own bowl and get the same oats in sachets, and the cost comes down to $1.29 per 100g. Get out your own measuring implements and buy a 1kg box of plain Uncle Tobys Quick Oats (BYO bowl and honey), and you'll only pay 68c per 100g. And forego the fancy packaging, BYO bowl and honey and opt for the Coles Smart Buy Quick Oats, and you'll pay just 17c per 100g – that's less than 1/25 of the price of the Uncle Tobys cup!



Then there's the even more fancy: still Uncle Tobys, but packaged as O&G Apple, Cinnamon and Toasted Hazelnut Oats, these set you back $5.48 per 100g ($2.74 per cup). But the very same oats in a larger, 380g pack cost $1.97.

To save money and the environment, consider using your own bowl. ■

ON-THE-GO BREAKFAST FOODS COMPARED				PER 100g						PER SERVE					
Food	Company	Health Star Rating	Serve size (g)	Energy (kJ)	Protein (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Total sugar (g)	Fibre (g)	Sodium (mg)	Energy (kJ)	Protein (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Total sugar (g)	Fibre (g)	Sodium (mg)
Apple, Cinnamon and Toasted Hazelnut	Uncle Tobys O&G	★★★★	50	610	3.6	0.4	8.6	3.1	34	305	2	0	4	2	17
Creamy Vanilla	Uncle Tobys Oats	★★★★	50	495	4.2	0.4	7.8	2.2	24	248	2	0	4	1	12
Banana Chia Pod	The Chia Co	★★★½	170	396	2.0	2.8	7.2	3.7	4	673	3	5	12	6	7
Vanilla Bean Chia Pod	The Chia Co	★★★½	170	381	1.8	3.2	6.5	3.0	3	648	3	5	11	5	5
Mango Chia Pod	The Chia Co	★★★½	170	367	1.9	2.7	6.3	3.8	2	624	3	5	11	6	3
Brekki Bikkies Fruit and Fibre	Belmont	★★½	37.5	1920	8.6	3.5	14.5	6.5	339	720	3	1	5	2	127
Brekki Bikkies Milk and Cereal	Belmont	★★½	37.5	1790	9.6	2.2	13.9	3.8	298	671	4	1	5	1	112
Cranberry	belVita	★★½	50	1670	8.3	3.7	19.3	5.7	300	835	4	2	10	3	150
Fruit and Fibre	belVita	★★½	50	1880	8.4	4.2	23.1	6.6	152	940	4	2	12	3	76
Crunchy Oats	belVita	★★	50	1920	8.1	4.2	22.0	4.9	553	960	4	2	11	2	277
Honey and Nut with Chocolate Chips	belVita	★★	50	1950	7.4	4.3	26.1	3.5	355	975	4	2	13	2	178
Milk and Cereals	belVita	★★	50	1920	8.6	4.1	19.7	3.4	428	960	4	2	10	2	214

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

Painful marketing

Drug companies have convinced consumers to pay up to five times more for paracetamol and ibuprofen than they need to. **Jemma Castle** investigates

When pain strikes, many people reach for branded over-the-counter (OTC) pain relief such as Panadol or Nurofen rather than their cheaper generic equivalents. But is there really any difference between what's essentially just a paracetamol or ibuprofen tablet? Do you actually get a painkiller that's more effective, safer or even faster acting when you pay more?

The short answer is no, not really. But given the plethora of painkillers on the market, it's easy to be fooled.

We've investigated the OTC pain relief market and found drug companies have successfully convinced consumers to pay one-and-a-half to five times more than they have to (at supermarkets, chemists and online in April 2014) for a humble ibuprofen or paracetamol tablet.

Gregory Peterson is a professor of pharmacy at the University of Tasmania and his advice for choosing pain relief medication? "Go with the cheapest. That's what I do."

What's the difference?

Whether branded or generic, when it comes to paracetamol and ibuprofen there's no difference in quality.

Fast acting?

Many painkillers on pharmacy shelves claim to be rapidly absorbed. Panadol has various "fast" formulations such as Optizorb, Panadol Rapid and Panadol Extra with Optizorb. Nurofen also makes similar claims for its Zavance range. Both Nurofen and Panadol's fast-absorbing drugs can cost up to almost double the price of their regular counterparts. But are they really any faster than your regular painkillers and are they worth the mark-up?

"Most of the hype about 'faster-acting' paracetamol or ibuprofen is just that – hype," says Dr Louis Roller, associate professor in pharmacy practice at Monash University. The sentiment is echoed by Professor Peterson, who says that "on the whole, there is very little convincing evidence for any differences in speed or efficacy

Whether you pay three cents or 17c a tablet, the same dosage of paracetamol will work in exactly the same way. The same goes for ibuprofen.

While this may sound like common sense, it doesn't seem to influence the way we shop for pain-relief drugs. In fact, over the past 10 years we've become more likely to choose Panadol or Nurofen despite the increase of cheaper pain relief alternatives on sale.

In 2013, Australians spent around $629m on OTC painkillers, according to Euromonitor International data. Panadol's market share of 28% is closely followed by Nurofen at 22%, and no other brand of paracetamol or ibuprofen comes anywhere near, with the next most popular brand being Herron Gold at 2.2% market share and Panamax with 2.1%.

Know the active ingredient and safe dosage

Paracetamol
4000mg in 24 hours (8 standard 500mg paracetamol tablets or 6 slow-release 665mg tablets)

Ibuprofen
800mg of ibuprofen in 24 hours (4 standard 200mg ibuprofen tablets)

IBUPROFEN VS PARACETAMOL

While Panadol and Nurofen are the two main competitors in OTC painkillers, their active ingredients are actually two different products that work differently to relieve pain. Ever since ibuprofen was made available for sale on supermarket shelves in 2004, ibuprofen sales have given paracetamol products some competition. But it's not always the best drug for the job.

When should you take what?

In many cases paracetamol and ibuprofen can be used interchangeably. While it's still not known exactly how paracetamol works, it's considered safer than ibuprofen in most individuals, according to Peterson, and also costs less.

But there are instances where ibuprofen may be a better choice. As an anti-inflammatory, it's preferred for injuries such as sprains. Michael Vagg, a pain specialist at Barwon Health also recommends it for headaches if you get them several times a week to prevent further headaches from medication overuse. Ibuprofen should be avoided by people with stomach problems such as ulcers, high blood pressure, heart failure, asthma or who are pregnant.

Vagg says there are many studies suggesting a combination of one paracetamol and one ibuprofen tablet is more effective for acute pain, such as headaches, than either treatment alone (this doesn't apply to persistent or chronic pain like arthritis). Maxigesic is a new product combining ibuprofen and paracetamol that hit the shelves in March this year, but for now it's quite pricey.

between the various forms of ibuprofen or paracetamol".

Obviously the medication needs to be absorbed before it can start acting. Peterson suggests a soluble product, or aspirin, may be more quickly absorbed. There's also some evidence that liquid capsules are absorbed marginally faster because the tablet doesn't have to break down. But essentially, there's little difference between the regular and fast-absorbing products.

Pain specialist Michael Vagg says most painkillers are well absorbed anyway, within 15-30 minutes. Although the claims Panadol and Nurofen make that their faster products are absorbed twice as fast as their regular products may be true, they're not "clinically relevant," says Vagg.

What about Zavance?

The variety of premium products can be very confusing for consumers. Nurofen's Zavance liquid capsules are the most expensive Zavance product on the market, so you'd probably assume the product is better or faster acting. However, that may not be the case.

Most Zavance products have sodium ibuprofen as their active ingredient and claim to be "absorbed up to twice as fast as standard Nurofen". But the pricier Zavance liquid capsules only claim to be "absorbed faster than standard Nurofen" and the active ingredient is the same as standard Nurofen liquid capsules – ibuprofen propionic acid. When we asked Nurofen's parent company, Reckitt Benckiser, about this, they said it is the excipients, or non-active ingredients, in Zavance liquid capsules that make the product act faster, rather than the active ingredient.

Professor Peterson acknowledges that excipients can affect the rate and extent of drug absorption, but argues that "in most cases the differences are probably modest and unlikely to make a huge difference to the patients' outcomes. Often, it is more about marketing".

Nurofen liquid capsules – 200mg ibuprofen

Nurofen Zavance liquid capsules "absorbed faster than standard Nurofen" – 200mg ibuprofen

Nurofen Zavance tablets/caplets "absorbed up to twice as fast as standard Nurofen" – 256mg sodium ibuprofen dihydrate

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK | * AVERAGE OF THREE ONLINE PHARMACY PRICES IN MARCH AND APRIL 2014.

Parallel Panadols

You only need to take a quick look at the supermarket or pharmacy shelves to see the sheer number of products that both Panadol and Nurofen have to offer. In addition to the usual variations in tablets, caplets and so on, as well as variations on the theme of "fast acting", there's also a double up in products with exactly the same formulation, just marketed differently.

Consider the packaging of Panadol Osteo and Panadol Back & Neck Long Lasting. Both contain 665mg of paracetamol and are marketed as "sustained-release" tablets, relieving pain for up to eight hours. Yet Panadol Back & Neck Long Lasting is almost four times more expensive per caplet than Panadol Osteo (only sold in packs of 96 while Back & Neck comes in a 36-pack). GlaxoSmithKline, Panadol's parent company, admits that "both products have the same formulation" and are "identical" (apart from their price tags).

Panadol argues the reason Panadol Osteo costs less than regular Panadol is that Panadol Osteo is on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). While true, Panadol Osteo can also be bought over the counter for less. The PBS listing should have no effect on the retail price of products bought over the counter.

In addition, in 2012 the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) recommended that medicines not be "marketed as '[brand] headache', '[brand] backache', '[brand] joint pain' [and so on] if they include the same active ingredient with the same dose". The TGA says the proposed changes should be enacted with a new labelling order, but further consultation is needed before it can be finalised.

Panadol Osteo (96 caplets) – 665mg paracetamol

Panadol Back & Neck Long Lasting (36 caplets) – 665mg paracetamol

Panadol (20 tablets) – 500mg paracetamol

'Targeted' pain products

As CHOICE highlighted when we awarded a Shonky to Nurofen in 2010 for its range of "targeted" pain-relief products, ibuprofen cannot and does not directly target specific pains. Ibuprofen works throughout the body, attacking whichever pain it comes across, similar to the way a sprinkler puts out a fire.

But despite complaints, the TGA has approved the claim "targeted relief from pain". Coles has also decided to get in on this action with its MediChoice Migraine Pain and Period Pain ibuprofen tablets – exactly the same active ingredient as its regular ibuprofen gel capsules, but more than 1½ times the price. Coles' specific pain products are also more than three times expensive as Aldi's Hedafen liquid capsules, the cheapest bioequivalent product on the market, yet remarkably similar.

These four products are all made by Nova Pharmaceuticals in India

MediChoice ibuprofen soft gel capsules – 200mg ibuprofen

MediChoice Period Pain ibuprofen soft gel capsules – 200mg ibuprofen

MediChoice Migraine Pain ibuprofen soft gel capsules – 200mg ibuprofen

Hedafen ibuprofen liquid capsules – 200mg ibuprofen

Panadol and Nurofen accounted for half of all OTC analgesics sold in Australia in 2013

In the supermarkets

Beyond branded paracetamol, OTC pain relief medicines sold in Australia are manufactured by a limited number of companies. Various drug companies manufacture generic painkillers for private labels to put their brand on.

Nova Pharmaceuticals, for example, manufactures paracetamol for Aldi (Hedanol), Coles (private label) and premium brand MediChoice, all of which contain 500mg of the active ingredient paracetamol. While the inactive ingredients may be different, this does not affect the efficacy of the drug (although it's worth checking with your pharmacist if you have any allergies or intolerances). Neither Nova Pharmaceuticals nor Coles would comment on whether these were in fact exactly the same products.

Woolworths also lines up a home brand paracetamol against its own premium brand Woolworths Select medication. Woolworths Homebrand paracetamol tablets (made in Australia) cost four cents a tablet^. Alternatively, consumers can choose Woolworths Select paracetamol tablets (made in India), placed higher on the shelves in line with Panadol's paracetamol. But you'll pay a premium for essentially the same thing – these cost 16c a tablet^. ■

MediChoice paracetamol (Coles exclusive brand) capsule-shaped tablets – 500mg paracetamol

Coles' paracetamol capsule-shaped tablets – 500mg paracetamol

Hedanol (Aldi) capsule-shaped tablets – 500mg paracetamol

BUYING PAIN RELIEF MEDICATION

- **Look at the active ingredient and dosage you need.** Buy the cheapest tablet or capsule in the shape and coating you like. Cheaper products are often found on the bottom shelves.
- **Don't be fooled by "fast-acting" claims.** Medications with these claims are unlikely to be substantially fast enough to be worth the extra money. If you really want something faster acting, choose a soluble product or the cheapest liquid capsule.
- If you're still keen to buy a well-known brand, **Panadol Osteo costs a lot less than regular Panadol.** It does the same thing, but has a slightly higher dosage of paracetamol (655mg vs 500mg in regular Panadol). So be careful you don't go over the safe daily limit of 4000mg of paracetamol (six Panadol Osteo caplets).
- **One standard paracetamol (500mg) and one ibuprofen (200mg) combined may work better than either product alone for acute pain** (such as headaches, migraines and sprains), according to recent studies. More generally, paracetamol costs less than ibuprofen, and is considered to have fewer adverse side effects.
- **Ask your pharmacist about the inactive ingredients** if you have allergies or intolerances. Check with your pharmacist or call the NPS Medicines Line on 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424).

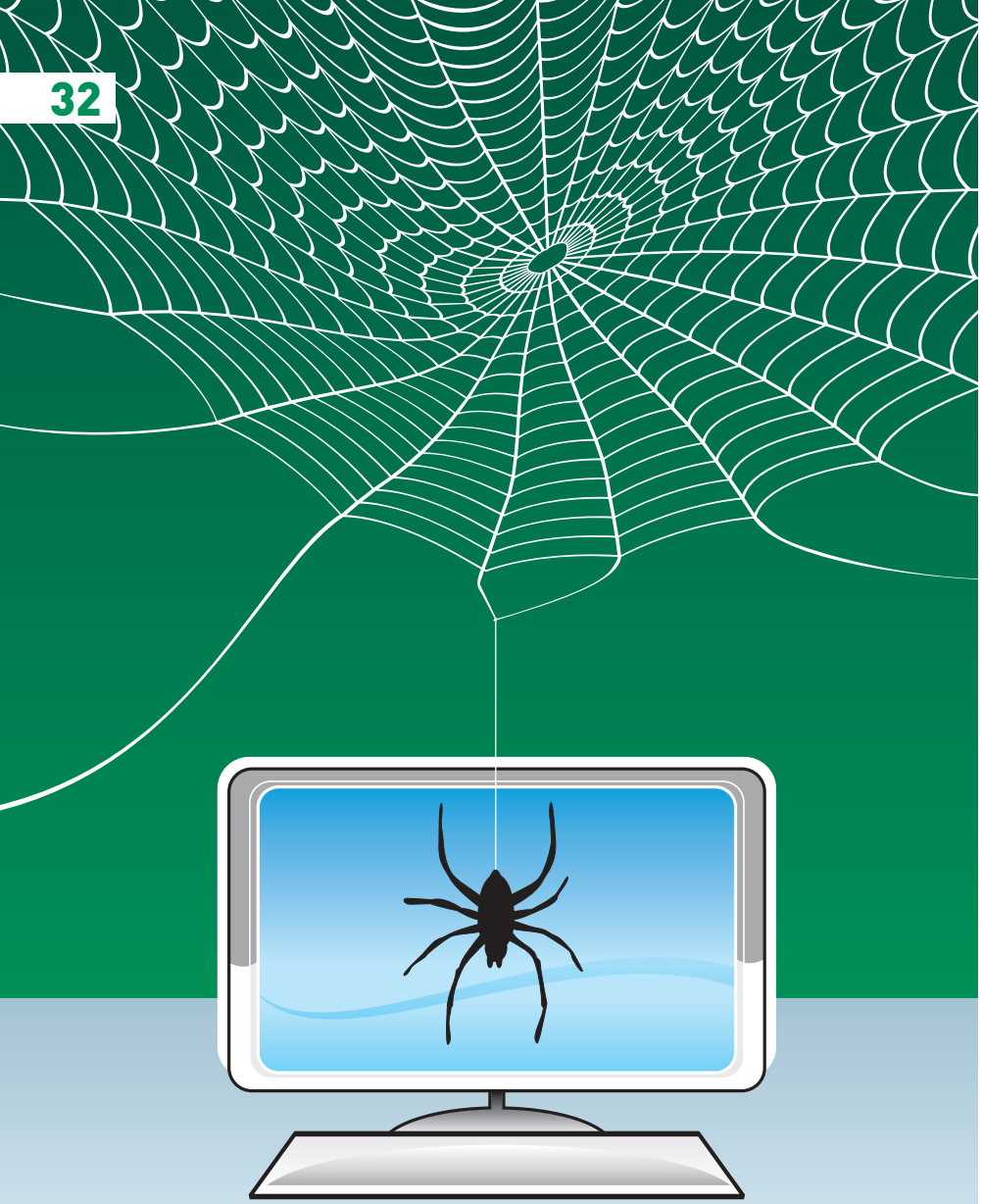
Are these medicines safe?

A large chunk of the analgesics we found on Australian shelves are made in India. It's a country where pharmaceutical manufacturing has come under increasing scrutiny in recent times from the US Food and Drug Administration. In 2013, drug manufacturer Ranbaxy USA was found guilty of violating Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP – principles and procedures that ensure quality drug manufacture) as well as falsifying documents.

However, all the experts CHOICE spoke with said OTC pain relief medicines in Australia are well regulated, and that there's no reason for concern about country of origin. If it's got the AUST R number on it, which all over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen are required to have, it means it's been through a thorough regulation process by the TGA.

For more information on how drugs are regulated in Australia, see **choice.com.au/painkillers**

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK * AVERAGE OF THREE ONLINE PHARMACY PRICES. ** IN-STORE PRICES FROM SYDNEY SUPERMARKETS IN APRIL 2014. ALL PICTURED PRODUCTS ARE MADE IN INDIA BY NOVA PHARMACEUTICALS. # IN-STORE PRICES FROM SYDNEY SUPERMARKETS IN APRIL 2014. ^ IN-STORE PRICES FROM SYDNEY SUPERMARKETS IN MARCH 2014.



Web of deceit

Have you been tricked into downloading or buying something you didn't want online, asks **Karina Bray**

Have you ever ploughed through page after page of an online airline-booking site, only to find you've paid for a whole lot of stuff you didn't want – baggage allowance, insurance or an allocated seat, for instance? Or have you downloaded some new software and later discovered a mysterious new toolbar on your browser, additional software or a new default search engine?

There's a name for these tricks: dark patterns.

Site of deception

The term "dark patterns" was coined by Dr Harry Brignull, a UK-based user experience consultant (see page 34). He explains that while the user interfaces on some websites are just badly designed and poorly thought through, others are deliberately designed to mislead.

The people behind these tricks benefit in several ways, including income via:

- "pay per click" (where payment is received each time someone clicks on an ad)
- signing people up to subscriptions
- obtaining personal information or information about friends
- getting access to people's computers
- tricking people into buying things they don't want.

Ticket to rort

If you've ever booked an airline ticket online, you'll know all about "sneak in basket" dark patterns. These are the little checkboxes already ticked on your behalf that sneak little extras into your shopping basket – baggage, insurance and so on. If you don't want them, you have to manually opt out by unticking the box.

Our very own Jetstar has achieved international notoriety for its add-ons and has been used in conferences and so on as an example of this consumer dark pattern trap.

When CHOICE logged on to book one return flight from Sydney to Melbourne, the following items were pre-selected for our convenience:

- 20kg baggage – $16.50 per flight.
- Seats – $5 per flight.

If we chose not to have preselected seats, we would have a seat randomly allocated to us. However, reading the fine print we found there was no guarantee we'd actually get the seat we paid for. So why would we pay for them to allocate us a seat? We could in fact skip this step and have a free seat randomly allocated to us by clicking the (very small) "skip seat selection" link.

Return flight only $170

"Hopefully the airlines can be forced to stop their practice – we ended up inadvertently paying $31 for insurance." – Pete

"It took me 45 minutes to book two domestic return flights on Jetstar's site because I had to keep checking for little details and add-ons."

– Julie G

- Insurance – $12.95
- A donation to StarKids charity – $2.

These "conveniences" brought our $170 fare to $227.95 – and that's before Jetstar added the $17 credit card surcharge. Other chargeable options on offer included carbon offsets, an SMS itinerary and a package providing more fare flexibility, though these at least were not preselected.

Apart from being a great example of drip pricing – the practice of adding lots of small charges to the initial advertised price, which the ACCC is cracking down on – there are several dark patterns at play. The pre-selected options require extra vigilance to uncheck them, and the relatively small opt-out text for seat selection. Convenient? Not really.

Meanwhile for the convenience of EU consumers, pre-ticked check boxes and other opt-out selections like these have been banned. Legislation was approved in 2011, with retail websites including airlines and other ticket services given two years to phase the practice out.

We contacted Jetstar for comment, but the airline did not reply before we went to press.

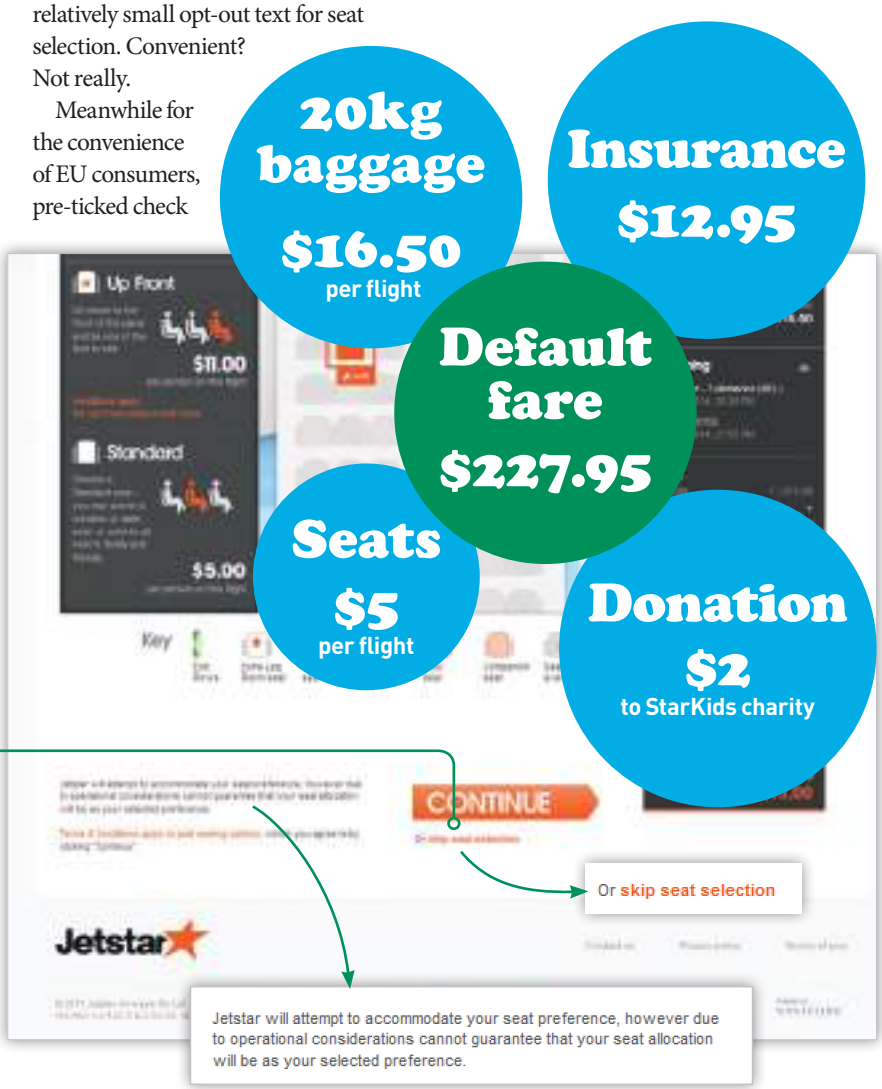


IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

Linking into disaster

When signing up to the professional networking site LinkedIn, you're asked to provide an email address and also your email password, which may not even be necessary if you're already logged in to your email. Members are then prompted to invite other people to join their network. Existing members are also prompted to expand their network.

This is the latest offering from LinkedIn's prompt to invite people to connect. It has selected 1210 contacts, not just the eight on the screen. Previous versions are different.

LinkedIn helpfully provides some suggested contacts from the member's email account, and if the member agrees, LinkedIn automatically sends an email inviting the contacts to connect, followed by two reminders.

The biggest, most prominent button on the page (above) is the "add connections" button, which looks like your typical "proceed" or "next" button. What's not clear is that there are more suggested contacts than those shown on the screen, including everyone in your email account.

"This is most certainly a 'friend spam' dark pattern," says Brignull. "Some members will take the action in the belief they're doing one thing – setting up their LinkedIn account – when in fact they are doing another – inviting everyone they've ever emailed to become a LinkedIn contact, which can entail lots of unexpected emails being sent in the member's name."

The repercussions range from annoying and embarrassing to professionally and personally devastating for some, and a class action against LinkedIn has been launched in the US on behalf of people adversely affected by this. LinkedIn denies the plaintiff's claim that email addresses had been "hacked", and says people give their permission to obtain contact details. Given it's such a common problem, however, it's clearly not as transparent as it could be.

Beware the big green button

Then there's the "disguised ads" dark pattern. A confusing mess of ads and content means you're likely to click on the ad rather than download the software you want (see image, below).

The dark patterns continue. Usually, when downloading software you're given a couple of choices: typical wording might be "express installation – recommended" and "custom installation". Non-techie types will most likely choose the express installation, helpfully pre-selected, along with the word "recommended".

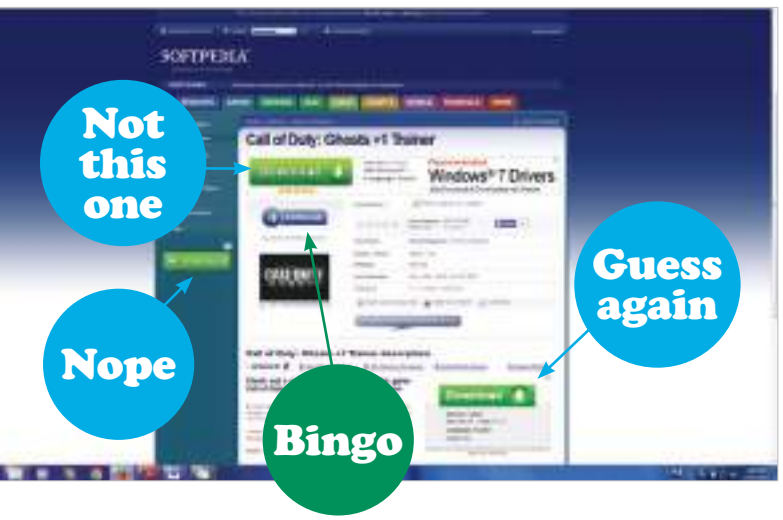
There are the big, friendly, often green buttons again, begging to be pressed. You happily speed through the installation steps with barely a pause to read what you're agreeing to, confident the vendor has your best interests at heart.

Not long afterwards you may notice you have new toolbars, a default search engine you've never heard of, icons for extra programs you don't want, potentially malware and spyware – in a word, crapware. Even reputable programs such as Adobe's Reader and Flash or Microsoft Internet Explorer may sneak all manner of stuff you don't want in to your basket. So if you've ever wondered how all this stuff got on board, you may have agreed to it without realising. And that's thanks to the dark patterns that convinced you they were helping you out.

Ad search

Remember a few years ago, when searching on Google you'd see the ads at the top of the page with a yellow background? Have you noticed over time that yellow background getting lighter? Last year, the US Federal Trade Commission took a dim view of this dimming colour, and ordered Google (and all search engines) to make ad content clearer by means of prominent shading and borders and clear text labels that appear before or to the left of the ad.

But with billions of dollars of advertising revenue at stake, should Google be worried? Probably not. When Google buckled to consumer advocates' demands to change the wording from "sponsored link" to "ad", click-throughs actually went up!



Fight the dark patterns

Ban the pre-ticked box CHOICE wants to see an end to pre-checked boxes for extra products, services, subscriptions and so on that force you to opt out – similar to the ban in the EU.

Know your enemy Familiarise yourself with all the dark patterns out there – you can check out the full range on darkpatterns.org

Caveat emptor Always read the fine print.

Do something Don't just sit back and take it. If a dark pattern has cost you money, try to get a refund – call the department of fair trading or consumer affairs in your state to find out what your rights are.

Contact the dark pattern conjurers If you feel their tactics are deceitful or misleading, tell them. Some companies changed their sites in response to consumer complaints.

Alert others Submit your example to darkpatterns.org And let us know too at investigation@choice.com.au And finally, beware the drunk dancer! (see right)

WATCH OUT FOR THE DRUNK DANCER!

Dr Harry Brignull, a user experience consultant with a PhD in cognitive science, is the man who first coined the term "dark patterns".

"One Friday night a few years ago I was pickpocketed on the way home from a bar. The way they did it was really clever – right in front of my face. When I got home I spent hours on the web reading about all the techniques that pickpockets use.

"I found out they'd used what's called the 'drunk dancer' technique on me, which basically involves the thief pretending to be drunk, hooking onto you and putting pressure somewhere on your body to distract you from what they were doing in your pocket.

"As I read about this, I realised that if I'd known the name of this technique beforehand, I'd never have let it happen. Scams don't work if the victim knows in advance how the scam works. Around that time, I was invited to give a presentation at a design industry conference about some of the tricks that low-cost airlines often use to get you to buy insurance or other add-ons. In doing the research, I realised these tricks were far more widespread than I expected.

"I got the feeling that everyone in the design industry sort of knew these tricks existed, but nobody had ever taken the trouble to identify and document them properly. This is where the term 'dark patterns' was born. I wanted to pin a name on them and get people talking about them more." ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Crowded house

Is crowdfunding in need of tighter regulation? **Andy Kollmorgen** finds out how the money flows

For entrepreneurs who need funding for their projects or ideas but don't have much pull with banks or private investors, crowdfunding has become a viable alternative – so much so that countries such as the US and New Zealand are putting regulations in place around it. Canada, France and the UK are considering doing the same.

But the grassroots approach to raising money still lies outside the financial mainstream in Australia, and some analysts think a bit of regulation wouldn't be a bad thing. Before its abolition in the May Budget, the federal government's Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee (CAMAC) was looking into the issue.

Crowdfunding – also known as crowdsourcing – seems to be a hit in Australia, where venture capital may be harder to find than in larger markets such as the US. So far, it's mostly been applied where funding is notoriously thin, such as music, arts, and performance projects. One of the world's biggest and best-known crowdfunding sites, US-based Kickstarter, recently started operating here – one of just five of its non-US locations. (The others are NZ, the UK, Canada and the Netherlands.)

Win–win for websites

Crowdfunding can get a project off the ground if the money comes through. But because the crowdfunding sites take a healthy cut of the funding that's processed through their online platforms, charge

What regulation?

Regulatory steps for crowdfunding under consideration in Australia include:

- Limiting the amount a person can invest in a crowd-funded company over a particular period of time.
- Limiting the amount a company can raise via crowdfunding.
- Mandating disclaimers and warnings on crowdfunding platforms that highlight the risks investors face.
- Requiring crowdfunding platforms to verify the identity of the companies seeking funds.
- Requiring funds to be held in trust by the crowdfunding platform until the funding target is met.

Even with such regulatory measures in place, however, funders will not be fully protected. "It is unlikely that any new regulatory structure will include specific requirements that the company deliver on promised rewards," says crowdfunding expert Steve Johns. However, companies that seek crowdfunding are subject to existing investor protection laws.

substantial transaction fees and take no responsibility for the trustworthiness of the people seeking funds, they come out ahead whether or not the project ultimately succeeds (though no funding changes hands if the financial target isn't reached).

Melbourne-based Pozible, which says it has become "one of the top three [crowdfunding] platforms in the world", claimed to have received $US19,197,929 in pledges as of mid-April.

Crowdfunding sites around the world aren't accountable if a project flops – and plenty do. But it's the success stories that have made crowdfunding a growth industry. Last year, two Brisbane-based video game developers used Kickstarter to crowdfund a game that was in mid-development after major game maker Sega closed its Brisbane studio.

$1bn+

Dollars pledged to Kickstarter projects as of mid-April 2014

A healthy cut

While crowdfunding sites don't take responsibility if promised funding rewards aren't delivered, they do take a hefty cut of the funding pie if the funding goal is reached. Pozible spokesperson Natasha Duckett told us that if a campaign fails to meet its funding target, "we will not process any transactions or take any moneys put towards the account". The same is true of Kickstarter.

POZIBLE SERVICE FEES:	KICKSTARTER SERVICE FEES (AUSTRALIA):
• Five per cent fee on total funds raised up to $100,000 • Four per cent on total funds raised between $100,000-500,000 (or for previous successful project creators) • Three per cent on total funds raised of $500,000 or more	• Five per cent fee on total funds
POZIBLE TRANSACTION FEES:	**KICKSTARTER TRANSACTION FEES:**
• **Credit or debit card** – 2.4% + 30c (Australian card); 3.4% + 30c (international card) for each transaction • **PayPal** – 2.4% + 30c per transaction in Australia; Bitcoin – ฿ 0.001 per transaction (via Coinjar)	• Three per cent and 20c for each pledge

They aimed for $600,000 and ended up with almost $800,000 from about 15,000 funders around the world.

More recently, two NSW fund-seekers who launched their project on Pozible exceeded their $10,000 target to fund a brand of Australian-made organic vodka. The reward for funders was bottles of vodka, an invite to the launch party, and an "Australian spirit tasting and cocktail making master class", depending on how much you gave (the range was $20 to $1000). The funding target was reached in April; the estimated award delivery date is June 2014.

Funding fiasco

Kickstarter reports that 43% of the projects posted on its website are successfully funded. But successful project owners don't always keep their promises to funders, as the Zion Eyez case proved.

The promised reward for Zion Eyez funding of $US150 or more was the finished product, a pair of eyeglasses capable of recording HD video. But funders ended up empty-handed after about $US340,000 was raised on Kickstarter, and the project's founders effectively disappeared. The original target was $US55,000, and Kickstarter takes no responsibility for what happened to that sum or the extra $US285,000 even though it would still have presumably taken a five per cent cut, plus transaction fees of up to five per cent, for each pledge.

Our rough calculations put Kickstarter's share of the Zion Eyez project at about $US17,000, excluding the transaction fees.

Pozible vs Kickstarter

Pozible claims a funding success rate of 55% compared with 43% for Kickstarter, although the latter has funded significantly more projects. Music, art, film, video and performance are among the most funded categories on both.

Kickstarter claimed to have funded 59,880 successful projects as of mid-April, and hosted 77,521 unsuccessful ones. Sixty-two of the successful projects generated $1m or more, and the company has seen more than $1bn in total pledged to its projects. The top two most funded Kickstarter project categories by a wide margin are music and film and video, with technology and dance the least funded.

Pozible says it had hosted about 6000 projects as of April and received $US18,993,045 in pledges. It currently receives more than $US1m per month.

Beware the disclaimers

Crowdfunding sites may represent a new frontier for raising money, but it's a frontier that imposes all kinds of terms and conditions on participants. Pozible's terms and conditions run to about nine pages and include this sweeping waiver: "Pozible has no control over the quality, safety, morality or legality of any aspect of the rewards listed, the truth or accuracy of the listings, the ability of project creator to sell rewards or the ability of project supporter to pay for rewards."

Such language leaves funders wide open to scams, although Pozible spokesperson Natasha Duckett argues this is an "incredibly rare occurrence". She says the platform "will act as a mediator and contact any campaigners who fail to fulfil their rewards if we receive a complaint. If this remains unfulfilled, we will pass the crowdfunder's details onto the pledger, who can contact the consumer authorities and make a formal complaint themselves".

While Pozible won't take ultimate responsibility for the behaviour of fund-seekers, "we require anyone who establishes a campaign to scan their photo ID and supply us with contact details", Duckett says.

Piece of the action?

Some overseas crowdfunding platforms offer funders part ownership of what they're helping to fund – otherwise known as equity. One local crowdfunding expert we spoke to, Steve Johns of the multi-national law firm Norton Rose Fulbright, says offering funders equity would be a step forward for Australian-based platforms.

"It's very difficult to crowdfund in return for equity in Australia, and this has limited the projects capable of being crowd-funded and the investors willing to invest in those projects," Johns says. "A key purpose of any new regulatory structure would be to facilitate equity crowdfunding. If Australia doesn't do this, it risks losing projects to countries where equity crowdfunding is permitted."

While the details of any new crowdfunding rules remain uncertain, Johns says protecting funders will be a central plank. "Investor protection is particularly important as investors are likely to be unsophisticated and have limited financial resources, and companies are likely to be at a very early stage with little or no track record." ■

Safety check

Pozible told us it doesn't have an official safety checklist for funders, but recommends consumers consider the following before pledging:

- **Has the fund-seeker clearly explained what they will do with the money if they reach their target?**
- **Have they been clear and transparent in their campaign message?**
- **How have they responded to questions about the project on social media platforms?**

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

All hail the taxi apps?

Jade Pendlebury gives you the lowdown on the smartphone apps that are rapidly changing the way you can book a taxi

If you catch taxis, have a smartphone and live in one of Australia's larger cities, you might have noticed some new players in the taxi booking game – apps. These apps allow you to book, track and pay your taxi driver directly, all without a single phone call or cash changing hands.

Currently, the taxi apps on the Australian market making the biggest inroads are Uber, goCatch and Ingogo, which can make booking a ride as easy as pressing a button.

So what do these new kids on the block offer? CHOICE takes a closer look.

goCATCH – gocatch.com/

The NSW government-backed goCatch connects consumers directly with registered taxi drivers who have downloaded the app in every capital city in Australia. Co-founder Andrew Campbell argues his service provides greater certainty of getting a cab and reliability of service for passengers compared with standard cabs. "With goCatch you know when you've got a taxi and you know exactly where your driver is. You can see them moving on the map and you can also call them on the phone."

HOW DO YOU PAY?

Similar to Uber (right), goCatch allows users to leave a rating for their drivers and pay for the fare through the app. While there is currently a 7.5% surcharge in most cities (five per cent in Victoria), Campbell says this is set to be reduced to five per cent Australia-wide.

Hot tip: goCatch also offers users the ability to offer a tip for the driver, to increase your chances of getting a cab faster during peak times. However, the Australian Taxi Industry Association (ATIA) has said this "bidding war" is an unfair practice and discriminatory towards passengers who can't afford to tip.

goCatch is available from Google Play, BlackBerry World, Windows Phone Apps + Games Store and iTunes App Store.

INGOGO – ingogo.mobi

Named in the top 100 of Australia's coolest companies in 2013 by *Anthill* magazine, Ingogo is a Sydney- and Melbourne-based taxi-booking app, started up by Moshtix founder Hamish Petrie and backed by Australian investors and a government grant."The taxi industry is ripe for

UBER – uber.com

Uber originated in the US and is available in more than 80 cities worldwide. In Australia, it's only operating in Melbourne and Sydney, though it will be launching in Brisbane soon. Uber has grand plans to eventually roll out to every major city in the world, says Uber's Sydney general manager David Rohrsheim.

Sydney customers have the choice of booking an UberBlack, UberLux or UberTaxi service, all of which provide a different level of service, luxury and price (visit uber.com/cities/sydney for the pricing structure). For now, Melbourne customers only have the option of UberBlack (see uber.com/cities/melbourne).

UberTaxi: No credit card surcharge and customers pay $2 booking fee and standard taxi meter rates.

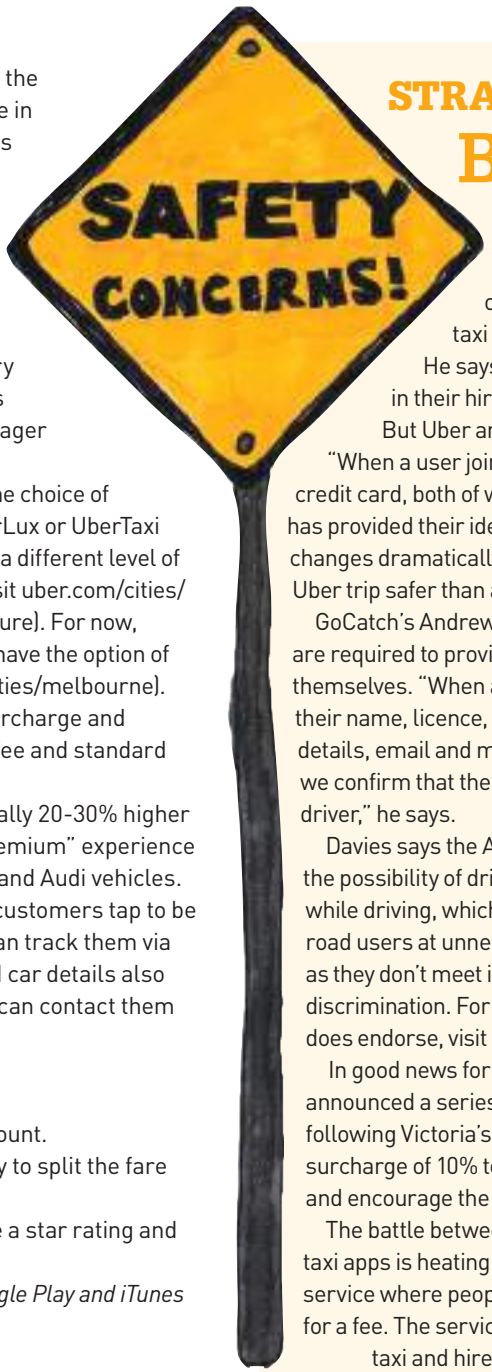
UberBlack: Fares are typically 20-30% higher than a regular taxi for a "premium" experience with Holden Caprice, BMW and Audi vehicles.

Once they're registered, customers tap to be connected to a driver and can track them via GPS. The driver's name and car details also appear on the app, and you can contact them if you need to.

HOW DO YOU PAY?

- Credit card or PayPal account.
- Uber also offers the ability to split the fare with friends.
- Customers can then leave a star rating and comments on the app.

Uber is available from Google Play and iTunes App Store.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEMMA RASMUSSEN

STRANGER DANGER

Blair Davies, CEO of the Australian Taxi Industry Association (ATIA), argues the industry works hard to keep predators out of taxis. "There is a national criminal history check of every driver before they drive a cab, and if there is an allegation of some sort of sexual offence, they will have their taxi licence suspended until the matter is cleared." He says he's not so sure taxi apps are as thorough in their hiring process.

But Uber and goCatch told CHOICE their services are safe. "When a user joins Uber, they must provide a phone number and credit card, both of which are verified," says Rohrsheim. "The driver has provided their identification to us in person. We find that behaviour changes dramatically when nobody is anonymous, making an Uber trip safer than a street hail."

GoCatch's Andrew Campbell says drivers are required to provide information about themselves. "When a driver registers we capture their name, licence, driver authority card, bank details, email and mobile phone number, and we confirm that the driver is an authorised taxi driver," he says.

Drivers are required to provide information to goCatch about themselves

Davies says the ATIA is also concerned about the possibility of drivers using smartphone apps while driving, which may put their passengers and other road users at unnecessary risk. ATIA doesn't endorse these apps as they don't meet its criteria on safety, customer complaints and discrimination. For a list of apps affiliated with cab companies it does endorse, visit atia.com.au

In good news for NSW consumers, the state government recently announced a series of reforms to the taxi industry, which includes following Victoria's lead and slashing the Shonky-winning credit card surcharge of 10% to five per cent. The government will also regulate and encourage the creation of new taxi booking apps in the market.

The battle between the traditional taxi industry and smartphone taxi apps is heating up. Uber now offers a low-cost UberX "ride-share" service where people can provide transport in their own car to others for a fee. The service is being offered in addition to the existing Uber taxi and hire car service. Uber is advertising for potential drivers over 24 who have a driver's licence and no criminal history. They must also own a 2005 model or later four-door car covered by comprehensive insurance.

In April, Transport for NSW said that by law, any drivers offering transport to paying members of the public must be in a licensed taxi or hire car, or be an appropriately accredited driver authorised by Roads and Maritime Services. Anyone in breach of the law could face prosecution and fines of up to $110,000.

In Victoria the service is currently being investigated by the Victorian Taxi Services Commission, and drivers operating under UberX have reportedly been fined $1700. ■

disruption," Petrie told *BRW* in 2013. "It's been monopolised for so long and mobile technology offers a way to disrupt the incumbents pretty drastically."

Similar to goCatch, Ingogo lets passengers locate their driver on the map, call and pay for the ride all within the app. Ingogo claims its booking and payment fees are lower than other networks, and guarantees passengers $10 in credit if an advance booking is cancelled and can't be replaced.

Ingogo is available from Google Play and iTunes App Store.

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q My 14-year-old son wanted a Visa Debit card to use with his Student Freedom account with Bank of Melbourne (BOM). He also has a $6000 Incentive Saver account with BOM, which I'll let him access once he turns 18. That account is in his name but I'm the only signatory. He's not responsible enough to handle the sums of money yet (he has Asperger's).

I was shocked when BOM told me that, as the accounts are in his name, he can access both accounts through their internet banking system and transfer money online from the Incentive Saver account. It can't be "viewed only", which is what I'd prefer, so that by watching it increase every month he learns the value of saving. I'm disappointed that the Incentive Saver account cannot have a "view only" option with his online banking.

A CHOICE journalist Uta Mihm replies: We understand your concerns and have followed this up with BOM; they say one option you have to resolve the problem is to put a "two to sign" restraint on the account. Withdrawals can then only be made in a branch while both you and your son are present. He'd still be able to have online access, just not to make withdrawals. Deposits would not be affected.

Uta Mihm

Q I live in a remote area where the electricity supply is a little dodgy – it runs on a slightly higher current than usual and we often have brownouts and surges that can trash the fancy electronics in new whitegoods. LCD displays and clever sensors are actually a problem for us, and getting them repaired is also a major challenge. So with my previously reliable old front loader now officially deceased, what would be the best and most robust available machine with the least fancy gizmos?

A CHOICE whitegoods expert Matt Steen replies: It sounds like you may need to go either for an old-school commercial washer or for a really base model of a series (FL - W1913 Miele, TL - MW513 F&P), as these tend to skimp on the fancy features. Even some of the base-model Simpson series may be OK for you. ■

Matthew Steen

Q My 84-year-old mother has a clear Do Not Knock sign on her front door, yet in the past six months has been repeatedly approached by the same tree-loppers selling their services. On each occasion they've been told they're not welcome and to please obey the sign. The last two times they knocked twice in the same week! I've contacted the ACCC and Victorian Consumer Affairs to see what can be done to stop these people harassing my mother. Both organisations told me the other was the responsible authority. Victorian Consumer Affairs told me the sign is unenforceable and to call the police and report it as a trespass matter. I did this and of course the police won't give it a high priority, although they've recorded the "offender's" details for future reference.

Meredith Cridland

A CHOICE consumer rights advisor Meredith Cridland replies: The Federal Court has found that a Do Not Knock sticker is an unambiguous request to leave the premises. There have been some recent cases of companies having to pay hefty fines for ignoring the signs. The maximum fine per breach is $10,000 for an individual and $50,000 for a business.

If you haven't yet received a satisfactory response from the ACCC or your state's consumer protection agency, try phoning again as you may need to speak with a person who has a bit more experience in these matters. There is also a complaint form on the ACCC website that you can fill out – see accc.gov.au

You could also contact the tree-lopping business directly on your mother's behalf to let them know that what they're doing isn't legal.

Ask us!

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to us at:
Ask the Experts, CHOICE,
57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville,
NSW 2204.
We regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

COMPILED BY SIOBAHN DONOHOE. IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

On Test

Electric toothbrushes, slow cookers and headphones – they're all here

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Powders outperform liquids in the stain removal stakes

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Why doesn't CHOICE test those super-fast dishwashers found in cafes? Find out

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Don't make a service call before reading our advice

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We pay more than lip service to the search for a perfect brush

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For hearty, wholesome dinners, it's best to take things slow

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Reclaim some space and comfort for your next road trip

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Dealing with inflation and other crucial data concerning treads

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Feel warm and fuzzy as we discover the best products for the job

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We bend an ear to some sweet-sounding sets

We find testing tyre safety and value an uplifting experience on page 64

CHOICE's Graham Byrne is jacked off by over-priced tyres that aren't safe

CHOICE

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE Shopper
Members who have subscribed to CHOICE through our website have access to the best deals on products wherever this logo appears. Simply have your CHOICE membership number on hand, the model name and number, and the price you have been quoted. Phone 1300 360 655 and we'll source you the best deal.

CHOICE Online
For more related information and articles on this topic, go to **choice.com.au**

CHOICE Best Buy
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

The power of the powder

Powders outperform liquids in the stain removal stakes, **Martha Psiroukis** finds

We used some of the 10 most common stains to test the latest batch of laundry detergents, as picked by you in a recent member survey. The results clearly show that for stain removal power, you can't go past a powder detergent.

So for those who like to get down and dirty – or have kids and babies that do – your best bet is one of the top performers in our recommended list (page 44 for top loaders and page 46 for front loaders).

But many people will only have lightly soiled clothes – no stains, just a bit of collar scuff or sweat marks. In this case, any detergent with a score of 60% or more for general detergency and perspiration stains are worth considering.

Nutshell

- Results for 57 washing powders and liquids in cold water, with more stains tested than ever before.
- While powders are better for stain removal, only liquids shine when it comes to being green.

GOING GREEN

In addition to our performance tests, we've once again teamed up with City West Water (a government-owned Melbourne water corporation) to analyse the chemical load the detergents add to the environment.

Greywater refers to water from the hand basin, shower, bath, spa bath, washing machine and laundry tub. Technically, the kitchen sink and dishwasher are also considered greywater. However, water from the kitchen is generally too high in grease and oil to be reused successfully without significant treatment.

The GreySmart Household Product Assessment tool was developed using the framework of the Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling (2006). The GreySmart researchers identified the hazards that should be considered when greywater is used on household gardens and developed a detailed environmental risk assessment that determines if greywater containing individual products such as laundry detergents will be safe and sustainable for use on the garden.

There are two GreySmart ratings a product can receive if it passes the risk assessment: "GreySmart with care" and "GreySmart". Products that don't pass the risk assessment are not given a rating.

GreySmart with care recommends that the greywater is OK for use on the garden. However, some soil management may be required within a year or two to maintain its health. **GreySmart** products are OK for regular use on the garden. See the tables on pages 44 (top loaders) and 46 (front loaders) for which detergents receive a GreySmart rating.

Water utilities are also doing more to recycle wastewater for use in industry, agriculture and urban irrigation, but are finding higher concentrations of detergent ingredients in wastewater. This limits the potential use of recycled water. So even if you don't use the greywater on your garden, by choosing a greener detergent you can help reduce the chemical load detergents add to wastewater treatment plants, which maximises opportunities to use recycled water and limits the impact on inland ecosystems.

These products are the better-performing detergents that score a GreySmart rating:

Green options	Cost per wash
59% Earth Choice Liquid (t)	33c
59% Trimat 2X Concentrated Liquid (t)	28c
58% Omo Sensitive Liquid (t)	52c
58% Trimat 2X Sensitive Liquid (t)	27c
58% Omo with Built-in Pre-treaters Liquid (f)	51c

(t) For top loaders. **(f)** For front loaders.

How we test

Dirt removal score/performance
We measure out the recommended detergent dose for a normally soiled load, and use it to wash specially soiled swatches attached to laundry items in cold water (20°C). Using a spectrophotometer, which measures how much light reflects off the swatches after filtering out any effects of optical brighteners, we measure how much dirt is removed from each swatch. These readings are more accurate than the human eye – differences of about 5% are noticeable. The soil swatches have particularly tough-to-remove stains to show up differences in detergent performance. So the actual scores shown are an indication of the detergent's relative wash performance – not a measure of the actual amount of soil removed from the fabric.

Soils The all-rounder general detergency swatch is stained with nut oil, milk and a colour pigment. We also include swatches with common stains that members tell us they need to tackle: Perspiration (stained with sebum – natural body oil and perspiration, i.e. stains commonly found on collars and cuffs); household dust; olive oil; tomato; make-up; grass; baby food; motor oil and aged blood. The swatch selection covers all the main types of stains and detergent functions – that is, general detergency – to keep soils suspended in the wash liquid and stop them from redepositing on your clothes, enzyme action on protein and oil-based stains, bleaching ability, and particle removal (dust).

IMAGE: S SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

Our recommended detergents score at least 70% for dirt removal. Best Buys are good performers at a good price.

TOP LOADERS

74%
Cold Power Maximum, 62c per wash

72%
Omo Ultimate, 67c per wash

71%
Trimat Advanced (Aldi), 31c per wash

For top loaders

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE						
	Packet price paid ($)	Cost per wash (c)	Dirt removal score (%)	General detergency (%)	Perspiration (%)	Household dust (%)	Olive oil (%)	Tomato (%)	Make-up (%)
Cold Power Maximum	9.49	62	74	71	82	69	72	75	97
Omo Ultimate	11.85	67	72	72	74	70	69	73	97
Trimat Advanced (Aldi)	5.99	31	71	68	77	64	66	73	94
Cold Power Bright & White Clean	8.99	38	68	65	71	69	57	75	94
BioZET Attack Air Burst Techlogy	10.50	42	67	63	73	65	63	73	94
Omo with Built-in Pre-treaters	11.85	52	67	68	67	64	64	72	94
Radiant Colour Guard Sensitive	13.99	48	65	61	71	64	61	66	91
Radiant Colour Guard No Sort	13.99	41	64	62	69	62	60	67	91
Trimat Advanced Sensitive (Aldi)	5.99	29	63	54	75	63	65	67	91
Omo Sensitive	11.79	50	62	54	68	64	58	68	93
Bosisto's Euco Fresh Ultra Concentrate	9.19	31	59	54	64	63	50	66	83
Drive Ultra Concentrate	6.99	32	59	50	69	62	57	66	87
Earth Choice	6.09	33	59	51	68	63	53	68	95
Trimat 2X Concentrated (Aldi)	4.99	28	59	52	66	57	58	65	96
Cold Power Bright & White Clean	8.99	43	58	51	59	63	54	67	97
Cold Power Sensitive Touch	15.00	36	58	50	60	65	54	69	95
Duo Cleans & Whitens Linen Fresh	5.99	29	58	56	62	59	44	65	88
Dynamo Superior Stain Removal	16.49	39	58	51	59	62	55	67	97
Dynamo with a Boost of Sard OXY Plus	10.00	49	58	51	61	63	56	65	98
Euca	14.95	28	58	50	66	63	52	65	85
Fab Fragrance Temptations Floral Enchantment	11.99	25	58	54	61	61	46	67	85
Omo Sensitive	10.99	52	58	50	65	58	56	68	97
Orange Power 3X	8.00	41	58	53	64	61	46	64	80
Trimat 2X Sensitive (Aldi)	4.99	27	58	50	65	57	58	68	97
Surf Tropical Oasis Ylang Ylang & Lily	6.29	28	57	51	63	62	47	65	86
Duo Cleans & Cares Sensitive	5.99	33	56	49	63	59	46	61	86
Ecostore Lemon	6.00	20	56	49	63	62	48	64	82
Radiant Colour Guard	9.35	41	56	51	62	56	53	65	93
Radiant Sensitive Colour Guard	9.35	42	56	52	62	55	53	62	92
Omo with Built-in Pre-treaters	10.99	52	55	51	59	55	51	63	95
Surf Tropical Oasis Ylang Ylang & Lily	6.49	31	55	50	61	54	54	64	94
Bosisto's Euco Fresh Allergen	6.95	65	54	48	59	53	52	64	95
Ecostore Eucalyptus	9.99	37	53	48	57	56	46	63	90
Euca	13.95	28	53	47	59	55	51	62	93
Orange Power 3X	9.00	29	53	47	60	54	48	63	89
Earthwise Orange and Eucalyptus	7.99	23	51	44	58	57	41	65	76
Earthwise Fragrance Free for Sensitive Skin	12.95	35	50	45	53	56	40	64	79
Water only	na	na	50	45	51	54	40	63	77

					GREYWATER USE	SPECIFICATIONS						
Grass (%)	Baby food (%)	Motor oil (%)	Blood (%)	Total suspended solids	GreySmart rating	Powder or liquid (P,L)	P or NP on packaging	Contains enzymes	Contains optical brighteners	Contact	Size of pack costed (kg)	Number of washes per pack
67	72	64	67	×		P	P	✓	✓	colgate.com.au	1	15
63	75	69	45	×		P	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	18
68	67	69	76	×		P	NP	✓	✓	aldi.com.au	1.5	20
54	68	66	64	×		P	NP	✓	✓	colgate.com.au	1	23
55	67	69	59	××		P	NP	✓	✓	biozet.com.au	1	25
58	69	58	60	×		P	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	23
50	62	59	65	×		P	NP	✓	ns	pzcussons.com.au	1.5	29
50	61	58	62	×		P	NP	✓	ns	pzcussons.com.au	1.5	34
50	62	59	69	×		P	NP		✓	aldi.com.au	1.5	21
48	65	65	59	×		P	NP		✓	unilever.com.au	1	24
50	60	53	62	★★★		P	ns		ns	fgb.com.au	1	30
48	63	57	59	×		P	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	22
46	67	54	39	×	◌	L	NP			naturesorganics.com.au	1	18
51	76	58	33	★	◌	L	NP	✓	✓	aldi.com.au	0.75	18
48	74	53	43	★★★		L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	1	21
48	74	60	41	★★★		L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	2	42
49	63	53	56	★★★		P	NP	✓	✓	pzcussons.com.au	1	21
48	77	53	40	★★★		L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	2	42
49	76	56	40	×		L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	1	21
47	59	56	63	★★★		P	P	ns	ns	euca.com.au	2	52
49	62	52	62	×		P	NP	✓	✓	colgate.com.au	2	47
48	79	50	33	★★★	●	L	NP	ns	ns	unilever.com.au	1	21
46	61	53	66	×		P	PF	✓		orangepower.com.au	1	20
50	77	57	32	★★	●	L	NP		✓	aldi.com.au	0.75	18
47	61	55	59	★★		P	NP	ns	✓	unilever.com.au	1	23
46	59	52	58	★★★		P	NP			pzcussons.com.au	1	18
47	63	54	52	×		P	PF			ecostore.com.au	1	29
47	74	54	33	★★★	●	L	NP	✓	✓	pzcussons.com.au	1.25	23
44	70	49	31	★★★	●	L	NP	ns	✓	pzcussons.com.au	1.25	22
46	74	46	32	★★★	●	L	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	21
45	73	52	32	★★★	●	L	NP		✓	unilever.com.au	1	21
45	71	52	30	★★★	●	L	PF	ns	ns	fgb.com.au	0.5	11
44	68	48	31	★★★	◌	L	PF			ecostore.com.au	1	27
47	69	47	30	★★★	●	L	NP	ns	ns	euca.com.au	2	50
45	71	48	31	×	●	L	PF	✓		orangepower.com.au	0.8	31
46	63	49	29	★★★		P	PF		✓	earthwise.co.nz	1	34
43	65	48	33	★★★	◌	L	PF			earthwise.co.nz	0.75	38
43	68	46	32	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na

USING THE TABLE

Price This is the price we paid for the pack size listed in March 2014.

Dirt removal score is made up of general detergency (35%), natural oils – sebum/perspiration (20%), household dust (15%), olive oil (6%), and tomato, make-up, grass, baby food, motor oil, and aged blood at 4% each. All tests are done in cold water (20°C).

Total suspended solids is an indication of the amount of insolubles in the detergent. Choosing one with more stars may leave less residue on your clothes when using a very water efficient machine.

GreySmart rating

● OK for regular use on gardens. The GreySmart analysis was conducted by Atura Pty Ltd on behalf of CWW. Assessment of detergents is based on long-term use of wash and rinse water.

◌ OK for use if greywater is to be used to irrigate the garden, but will probably need some management of the soil within a year or two (e.g. pH adjustment, nutrient management of addition of gypsum, lime or organic matter to manage soil structural changes). Before using products on your garden, go to greysmart.com.au for further information.

P or NP on packaging Phosphates help soften the water and keep extracted dirt in suspension. But high levels of phosphorus can lead to excessive growth of blue-green algae in inland waterways. P means low phosphorus (<7.8 g/wash) and NP is for no phosphorus or less than 0.5%. PF means there's no NP symbol but the manufacturer makes phosphate-free claims.

Enzymes target protein, starch or biological-based stains such as grass or blood. Different enzymes target different stains. Enzymes are known to cause irritation, so should be avoided by those with sensitive skin.

Optical brighteners coat the fabric with fluorescers that absorb ultraviolet light and re-emit it as blue light, making the clothes look whiter and brighter, but they don't actually remove any dirt. They help minimise greying of whites. Products with brighteners are best avoided by people with sensitive skin.

Size of pack costed / Number of washes per pack This is the most popular size we found in stores, from which we calculated the number of washes using the recommended dose for a normal wash.

TABLE NOTES ns Not stated.
na Not applicable.

WHAT TO BUY

Our recommended detergents score at least 70% for dirt removal.

FRONT LOADERS

72%
Cold Power Maximum, 56c per wash

70%
Omo Ultimate, 74c per wash

The power of the sun

Sunlight not only saves you time and money when drying your clothes – it also has excellent bleaching power and will fade or totally remove many stains such as tomato and turmeric. Just wash your items as normal and hang them out in the sun to dry.

For front loaders

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE												GREYWATER USE
	Packet price paid ($)	Cost per wash (c)	Overall dirt removal score (%)	General detergency (%)	Perspiration (%)	Household dust (%)	Olive oil (%)	Tomato (%)	Make-up (%)	Grass (%)	Baby food (%)	Motor oil (%)	Blood (%)	Total suspended solids	GreySmart rating
Cold Power Maximum	8.99	56	72	70	79	60	71	75	94	72	74	68	71	×	
Omo Ultimate	11.85	74	70	69	76	59	68	79	91	76	84	63	47	××	
Omo with Built-in Pre-treaters	11.85	47	67	67	71	57	66	80	91	69	81	63	46	×	
BioZET Attack Air Burst Techlogy	10.50	42	66	63	72	59	63	72	90	63	58	54	75	××	
Trimat Advanced	5.99	29	66	64	71	58	64	71	90	69	58	60	85	×	
Cold Power Bright & White Clean	8.99	37	64	63	66	57	58	70	86	65	62	50	75	★★	
Omo Sensitive	11.79	49	62	58	71	55	61	78	88	54	76	60	43	×	
Radiant Colour Guard No Sort	13.99	41	62	61	66	55	57	67	83	60	56	49	70	★★	
Cold Power Bright & White Clean	8.99	42	61	52	74	59	61	66	92	50	74	53	52	★★★	
Dynamo Excellent Stain Removal	16.49	45	61	52	72	56	64	69	94	52	76	52	57	★★★	
Dynamo with a Boost of Sard OXY Plus	6.00	31	60	50	74	59	61	66	94	50	76	52	54	★★★	
Drive Ultra Concentrate	6.99	29	58	54	62	55	54	66	85	49	60	49	74	★★★	
Duo Cleans and Whitens Linen Fresh	5.99	29	58	56	60	53	49	66	81	56	57	56	77	★★	
Omo with Built-in Pre-treaters	10.99	51	58	53	61	52	58	71	97	48	77	54	41	★★★	♲
Fab Fragrance Tempations Spice Allure	13.49	24	56	53	61	54	49	62	83	47	52	48	69	×	
Surf Tropical Oasis Ylang Ylang & Lily	6.29	28	55	47	62	55	48	65	83	43	56	47	74	★★	
Omo Sensitive	10.99	54	53	48	57	48	52	65	96	46	71	49	39	★★★	♲
Earthwise Fragrance Free for Sensitive Skin	7.99	23	52	49	55	51	45	70	71	44	66	50	37	★★★	
Ecostore Lemon	6.99	23	52	45	58	54	43	61	79	40	55	49	53	×	
Surf Tropical Oasis Ylang Ylang & Lily	6.49	31	52	47	57	47	57	64	96	45	73	51	33	★★★	♲
Water only	na	na	43	39	43	42	35	58	79	38	59	37	29	na	na

USING THE TABLE See table, page 44.

You can try adding diluted lemon juice to assist the sun's bleaching effect. But beware – drying stained items in a dryer will set most of these stains, making them even more difficult to remove.

Is top- or front-load washing better?

Comparing the soil removal results for front- and top-loader detergents (see the tables on page 44 and below left) would lead many to believe that the latter and their detergents are slightly better at soil removal. But that's not necessarily the case. If you compare front- and top-loader washing machine performance (see **choice.com.au/washers**), you'll notice that front loaders are better at soil removal.

To explain the disparity, the front loader used in our tests was set on a quick wash cycle, with a main wash at only 17 minutes. By comparison, the top loader was set on a normal program with a main wash of 24 minutes. So while the scores for the front-loader detergents are a little lower overall, you'll get better soil removal results in a typical front loader when using a normal program.

That said, many people are now opting to use fast wash programs on front loaders because of their ever-lengthening cycle times. This is fine for lightly soiled clothes, but for optimum stain removing results stick to a normal program.

Wash times make a significant difference to a front loaders performance due to their design – they have a gentle tumbling motion that swishes clothes through a small amount of concentrated detergent solution, and so rely more on time and the chemical action of a detergent to get the clothes clean while preserving textile fibres. By contrast, most top loaders tug and pull the clothes through a larger volume of water (hence lower detergent concentration levels) and rely more on their mechanical agitation to get the clothes clean. But they're also rougher on fabrics, so you may find items don't last quite as long. These differences in design (and water use, hence detergent concentration levels) also account for the fact that it's easier for a top-loader detergent to satisfy the being green criteria. However, one front-loader detergent, Omo with Built-in Pre-treaters Liquid, will also help you save water and reuse it safely and sustainably on the garden "with care". ■

SPECIFICATIONS

Powder or liquid (P,L)	P or NP on packaging	Contains enzymes	Contains optical brighteners	Contact	Size of pack costed (kg)	Number of washes per pack
P	P	✓	✓	colgate.com.au	1	16
P	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	16
P	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	25
P	NP	✓	✓	biozet.com.au	1	25
P	NP	✓	✓	aldi.com.au	1.5	21
P	NP	✓	✓	colgate.com.au	1	24
P	NP		✓	unilever.com.au	1	24
P	NP	✓	ns	pzcussons.com.au	1.5	34
L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	1	21
L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	2	37
L	P	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	1	19
P	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	24
P	NP	✓	✓	pzcussons.com.au	1	21
L	NP	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1	21
P	NP	✓	✓	colgate.com.au	2.5	57
P	NP	ns	✓	unilever.com.au	1	22
L	NP		✓	unilever.com.au	1	20
P	PF		✓	earthwise.co.nz	1	35
P	PF			ecostore.com.au	0.5	30
L	NP		✓	unilever.com.au	1	21
na	na	na	na	na	na	na

$131.40

How much you can save each year if you buy our Best Buy top-loading detergent over another top performer, when washing a load every day for a year.

Wired differently

Want professional performance from your dishwasher? You may need to rewire your kitchen first, says **Matthew Steen**

Sometimes our members ask about fast wash cycles in dishwashers, and why we don't test the really fast dishwashers that you often see in cafes or restaurants that take only minutes to wash, unlike most dishwashers you'll find in retailers.

The good news is we'll be testing a semi-professional model in our very next test. Although it claims to do an impressive 16-minute wash, this will depend on whether you have suitable wiring in your home. Commercial dishwashers often have two sets of heaters inside them to make the water heat up very fast, and this means more power going to the dishwasher. They need different wiring from your normal kitchen plugs, which tend to be 10 amp.

That means you'll need an electrician to both fix a new plug to the machine and adapt your kitchen wiring for a suitable connection. So keep this in mind if you're thinking about buying a semi-professional model – the purchase price is only the first of the expenses involved.

Nutshell

- 10 new dishwashers tested, two of which join our recommended list.
- Check our table (page 50) for models with features that suit you.

WHAT TO BUY

Our What to Buy criteria is based on scores of at least 75% for overall performance, 70% for wash performance and 80% for drying. Smeg and Westinghouse don't have as high a reliability rating as Asko, Bosch and Miele.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

STANDARD

78% Westinghouse WSU6603XR (Aug 13)	$1219
77% Miele G5715 SCU XXL CS (Aug 13)	$2599
75% Bosch SMS69T28AU (Mar 14)	$2379

WHAT TO BUY

STANDARD

79%
Smeg DWA315W

Good points
- Excellent drying score
- Has auto wash
- Half-load wash option

Bad points
- No child-lock controls
- Long cycle time

78%
Asko D5894

Good points
- Very good drying score
- Child-lock door
- Fan-assisted drying
- Half-load wash option
- Cheap to run

Bad points
- Long cycle time

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Will your **normal dishes fit into the dishwasher** without crowding or hitting the spray arms? Take a few large dinner plates and tall glasses to the store to check they both fit at the same time. Spin the spray arms to make sure they don't hit anything.

Auto program/dirt sensor programs are designed to optimise the amount of energy, water, time and temperature needed. But our research shows very few actually work.

Easy-to-lift height-adjustable top basket Almost all top baskets are height-adjustable, but if it is an easy-adjust system you can do this without removing the basket. Only a few can be adjusted when loaded. But larger internal tubs, often denoted by XL or XXL in the model number, means that adjustable baskets may not be required – but they still can improve versatility.

Fold-down/removable plate racks can help when loading pots and awkward items. Fold-down types are easier as they don't need external storage when not in use.

An anti-flood hose has an electric cut-off near the water tap connection, which means it stops leaks in the hose, not just in the machine. An anti-flood hose is high-level protection.

Half-load option is a program that may save water, time, and energy when washing half a load. With some models you can focus the wash to one basket. It's handy for washing a smaller load daily, so the dishwasher doesn't get smelly. Models with auto program/dirt sensor should automatically do this, but models with a tick in this column have a specific program labelled as such.

Eco wash programs mostly save on energy by washing at lower temperatures, and are ideal for use with enzyme-based detergents.

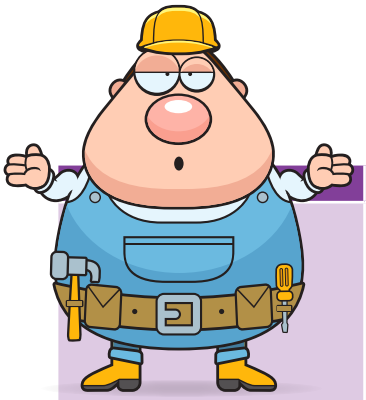
Fast wash or glasses programs are suitable for lightly soiled dishes, or if you rinse first (which we don't believe you need to do).

Cutlery trays are good for large utensils, and cutlery can be grouped on the tray as you load the machine, making unloading easier (but you can do this with baskets too). They may be safer by reducing the risk of stabs from knives and forks in standard cutlery baskets. We find they don't necessarily wash better than a cutlery basket. Note that machines with cutlery trays tend to have shorter heights between racks, which may be a problem if you have tall glasses and larger plates – again, always check before buying.

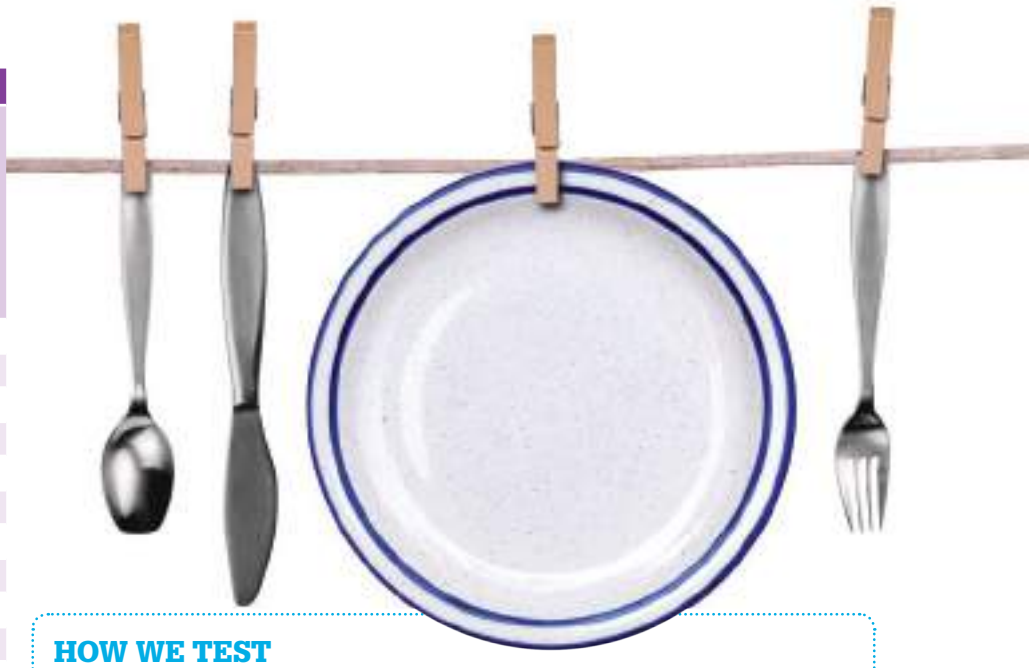
Cutlery basket A grid helps stop the cutlery pieces from nesting, to enable a better wash. For added versatility, look for a cutlery basket that can be placed anywhere in the bottom basket.

A **concealed heating element** stops items being damaged if they fall through the basket – particularly plastics – and also means food cannot drop onto the element and cause a burning smell. It's rare for dishwashers not to have one.

Controls and labelling The controls should be easy to use and the labelling intuitive and clear. Look for engraved or etched labels on stainless steel so they don't come off when cleaning. Only use a microfibre cloth, or warm soapy water on bonded labelling.



		COSTS		PERFORMANCE							BRAND			FEATURES							
		Price ($)*	Running cost ($ / 10 years)	Overall score (%)	Washing performance score (%)	Drying performance score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Energy used (kWh)	Water used (L)	Noise (dB)	Brand reliability (%)	Brand loyalty (%)	Cycle time (min)	Auto program / dirt sensor	Easy-to-lift / height-adjustable top basket	Fold-down / removable plate racks	Anti-flood device	Half-load option	Eco wash	Fast wash
STANDARD SIZE	• **Smeg** DWA315W	1590	1143	79	77	90	69	1.09	15	44	76	72	167	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• **Asko** D5894	2599	1057	78	75	88	73	1.00	13	48	86	93	140		✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Westinghouse WSU6603XR	1219	1595	78	81	80	51	1.54	19	43	82	86	144	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	Miele G5715 SCU XXL CS	2599	1221	77	74	88	65	1.19	13	46	89	94	140	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	Dishlex DX301SK	1109	1552	76	80	76	53	1.48	20	51	81	83	112	✓	✓/✓	✓/–			✓	✓
	• **Smeg** DWA214W	1190	864	76	76	75	80	0.82	12	51	76	72	149		✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	
	Westinghouse WSF6605WR	949	1528	76	80	76	52	1.50	14	46	82	86	138	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	Bosch SMS63M18AU	1399	1111	75	77	74	69	1.08	12	41	89	93	133	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Bosch SMS69T28AU	2379	988	75	71	87	75	0.95	12	42	89	93	121	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	• **DeLonghi** DEDW645S	799	1188	75	77	71	67	1.14	13	44	na	na	158	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓		✓
	Whirlpool ADP5000WH	649	865	75	85	48	81	0.80	13	52	69	61	132		✓/✓	✓/–	✓			✓
	AEG F77000WOP	1099	1628	74	73	87	50	1.57	19	42	86	90	155	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	Bosch SMS40M02AU	999	1083	74	74	75	71	1.05	12	43	89	93	127	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Bosch SMS68M12AU	1299	1099	74	74	76	70	1.07	11	43	89	93	127	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	LG LD1452WFEN2	999	1114	74	73	77	71	1.04	16	50	76	84	157	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Miele G 4420 Sci	1699	1391	74	73	84	58	1.36	14	40	89	94	136	✓	✓/✓	–/–	✓		✓	✓
	Miele G5935 SCi XXL	3799	1180	74	72	81	67	1.14	13	48	89	94	129	✓	✓/✓	✓/✓	✓			✓
	Bosch SMU68M15AU	1499	1123	73	74	73	69	1.09	12	41	89	93	134	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Dishlex DX103WK	739	1627	73	76	75	51	1.54	23	48	81	83	112		–/✓	–/–			✓	✓
	Miele G 4220	1199	1479	73	73	82	55	1.43	17	42	89	94	133	✓	✓/✓	–/–	✓		✓	✓
	Siemens SN46M582AU	1599	1180	73	72	77	69	1.08	12	45	na	na	129	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	Asko D5424WH	999	1028	72	76	62	74	0.97	14	55	86	93	105		–/–	–/–			✓	✓
	LG LD-1485T4	1792	1233	72	73	73	65	1.18	16	42	76	84	186	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Bosch SMS69T12AU	1749	1073	71	72	68	71	1.03	12	47	89	93	126	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• **Bosch** SMU65M25AU	1729	1012	71	71	71	74	0.98	11	48	89	93	135	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• **Euromaid** DW24S	699	843	71	77	51	82	0.78	15	52	na	na	124		–/✓	✓/–			✓	✓
	Miele G5500 SCU	2199	1377	71	70	80	59	1.34	14	49	89	94	137	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DW60CCW1	849	1471	70	72	71	57	1.38	19	51	72	83	130	✓	✓/✓	✓/–			✓	✓
	Asko D5532	1499	927	68	69	60	79	0.85	14	53	86	93	129		–/–	–/–			✓	✓
	• **Everdure** DWF146WE	398	928	68	72	52	78	0.87	14	52	na	na	128		–/✓	✓/–	✓			✓
	LG LD-1482W4	1199	1226	68	69	68	66	1.17	16	42	76	84	189	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Asko D5434	1299	708	67	73	43	87	0.64	14	44	86	93	102		–/–	✓/–			✓	✓
	Bosch SMS50E32AU	779	756	67	73	45	85	0.70	13	45	89	93	135	✓	–/✓	✓/–	✓	✓		✓
	• **Asko** D5457WH	1499	720	66	73	40	87	0.65	14	52	86	93	104		✓/✓	✓/–	✓		✓	✓
	• **Bellini** BDW127W-F	379	710	62	68	36	86	0.66	11	49	na	na	104		–/✓	✓/–	✓			✓
COMPACT / SLIMLINE	**Bosch** SPU63M05AU	1199	906	72	75	72	57	0.86	11	47	89	93	121	✓	✓/✓	✓/–	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Miele G4570 SCVi	1999	1090	72	74	77	45	1.05	12	46	89	94	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/✓	✓		✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD60DCW7	1579	1309	71	70	81	56	1.24	16	49	72	83	125		na	✓/✓		na	✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SCW7	900	679	69	68	78	54	0.66	8	48	72	83	125		na	✓/✓		na	✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SDFTX7	1210	698	69	69	76	54	0.66	8	49	72	83	124		na	✓/✓		na	✓	✓
	• **Omega** DW101WA	549	549	66	64	69	70	0.47	8	45	na	na	108		na	✓/–		na		✓
	Omega DW300XA	769	681	64	68	51	72	0.64	10	52	na	na	88		–/✓	✓/–				✓



SPECIFICATIONS

Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Water connection	Place settings	Type*	Colour*	Contact
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	15	FW	W	smeg.com.au
86 x 60 x 55	C only	15	SI	SS	asko.com.au
82 x 60 x 58	C only	13	BI	SS	westinghouse.com.au
85 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	BI	SS	miele.com.au
85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	SS	dishlex.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	smeg.com.au
85 x 60 x 62	C rec	13	FW	W	westinghouse.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
84 x 60 x 57	C only	15	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
85 x 60 x 61	C only	14	FW	SS	delonghi.com.au
85 x 60 x 59	H or C	12	FW	W	whirlpool.com.au
85 x 60 x 61	H or C	14	FW	W	aegaustralia.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	C only	15	FW	W	bosch.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	lg.com.au
81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	SI	SS	miele.com.au
85 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	SI	SS	miele.com.au
82 x 60 x 57	C only	15	SI	SS	bosch.com.au
85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	miele.com.au
82 x 60 x 57	C only	15	BI	SS	siemens-home.com.au
82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	SI	W	asko.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	lg.com.au
82 x 60 x 57	C only	15	FW	W	bosch.com.au
82 x 60 x 57	C only	14	SI	SS	bosch.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	euromaid.com.au
81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	W	miele.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	W	fp.com.au
82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	FI	na	asko.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	everdure.com
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	lg.com.au
82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	BI	W	asko.com.au
82 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
83 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	BI	W	asko.com.au
85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW	W	belliniappliances.com.au
82 x 45 x 57	C only	10	BI	SS	bosch.com.au
81 x 45 x 57	H or C	10	FI	na	miele.com.au
82 x 60 x 59	C rec	14	BI	W	fp.com.au
41 x 60 x 59	C rec	7	BI	W	fp.com.au
41 x 60 x 59	C rec	7	BI	SS	fp.com.au
44 x 55 x 50	C only	6	BT	W	omegaappliances.com.au
85 x 45 x 58	H or C	8	FW	SS	omegaappliances.com.au

HOW WE TEST

Washing performance Testers Graham Byrne, Mohamed Jawahir and Petr Valouch check the dishwashers' performance by placing egg yolk, spinach and baby cereal on plates, butter on saucers, tomato juice in glasses and tea in cups. They also put egg yolk and cereal onto cutlery and steam-bake oats onto a pan, all of which are left to dry for 15-18 hours before being washed (using the sensor program if the machine has one, or normal cycle if not) and dried. Each machine is tested at least twice and the scores averaged. The score is based on the number of specks of food left on the dishes or the area of the larger stains.

Note: Often the program we choose is not the same as the one used for energy and water rating labels – these tend to be eco programs, but most of our members tell us they use the normal program.

Drying performance is based on the number of drops and/or streaks left on the dishes half an hour after the end of the wash.

Energy efficiency We measure the amount of energy used in a cycle, and the time taken. We also measure the amount of water used. ■

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of May 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of washing performance (65%), drying performance (25%) and energy efficiency (10%). **Noise** is measured 1m away and 1m up from the dishwasher, which is placed within cabinetry. The noise level varies depending on kitchen layout, but our reading gives a comparative measure. A difference of 3dB is noticeable to the human ear. **Features** See What to Look For, page 49. **Water connection H or C** You can connect the dishwasher to hot or cold water. Connecting to hot water is likely to shorten the cycle time, but you may lose program versatility. You may need a tempering valve to connect to solar hot water, as the inlet temperature generally should not exceed 60°C. **C rec** The manufacturer recommends connecting to a cold tap, and the dishwasher heats the water itself (all dishwashers have a heater). **C only** You can only connect the dishwasher to a cold tap. **Type FW** Freestanding, with a worktop (can generally be inbuilt as well). **BI** Built-in – might not have top or side panels; must be enclosed and anchored to prevent it from tipping forward when fully loaded and dish racks are pulled out. **SI** Semi-integrated – a built-in type for which you can fit a panel to the door under the control fascia to match the rest of your kitchen cupboard doors. **FI** Fully integrated – built-in with the whole front matching your kitchen and the controls inside the door. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much the dishwasher will cost over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash a full load every day using a normal or auto-sensing cycle, based on 26c per kWh for electricity and $2 per 1000L water. The largest running cost will be the cost of detergent which can vary significantly, so it's not factored in these calculations.

TABLE NOTES • Newly tested. ***** Where possible, we've listed the white model code and price. Most models are available in other colours, finishes or types – usually at a higher price. Where the model numbers are different, we've listed them below. The colour given for SI models is for the control panel. **SS** Indicates any metallic or metallic-look finish; not all models are actually stainless steel. **na** Not applicable. **Brand reliability** and **brand loyalty**, where we have statistics, are taken straight from our brand reliability survey, but do not add to the overall score. These scores refer to the brand only, not that particular model.

Wash your cares away

Dishwasher causing you trouble? There are plenty of DIY checks and fixes before you need to make a service call, explains Matthew Steen

Nutshell

- We outline what to do when your dishwasher plays up.
- How you load your dishwasher – and with what – can make a big difference between a functional and struggling machine.

Most products we own inevitably break down at some point, whether it's during warranty, just after it, or – if you're lucky, nowadays – 20 years after you bought it. If you can figure out how to fix things yourself, you'll reap the benefits of feeling pretty awesome and earn bragging rights around the house – not to mention saving yourself money on call-out fees for what could be a very simple fault.

The most common dishwasher problems relate to what you're loading into it – detergent, rinse aid, dirty dishes – and how those dishes are loaded. Check your instruction manual first to see whether there is a fix. If an error code appears on the dishwasher's display screen, even better – the manual will generally tell you what it means.

SPOTS OR DETERGENT FILM

If you're seeing spots on glasses or a film of detergent on plates, try adjusting your rinse aid setting – check this in your instruction manual. Too much can cause streaks or stains, while too little means water won't sheet off the dishes as well as it can. Lipstick and tea can also be difficult to remove, so play around with programs or wipe items prior to loading them into the dishwasher. If you place glasses so they lean against each other, they may develop a staining point where they touch; they may also break from knocking against each other.

NOISE

Dishwashers can be noisy, ranging at the loudest part of the cycle between 35dB and 56dB – that is, between the volume of a whispered conversation to a normal-level conversation. The noise ranges between different wash and rinse cycles. If you're hearing really loud noises coming from the dishwasher, it's likely that some plates or other items are bumping against each other or that something is loose within the cabinet. Make sure your plates and glasses are secure in the racks. Some dishwashers come with hooks or racks to lock items in more securely.

Noises can also be caused by spray arms not rotating, so pause your dishwasher to check that the arms can freely spin and no plates are preventing them from rotating. Some dishwashers come with soundproofing material that should be installed prior to use; it usually looks like foam or cloth attached to a plate.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

INSTALLATION

Most manufacturers recommend getting this done by a licensed plumber. Prices range from free with delivery (usually costed into the price) up to $150 or more if it needs additional plumbing or electrical work.

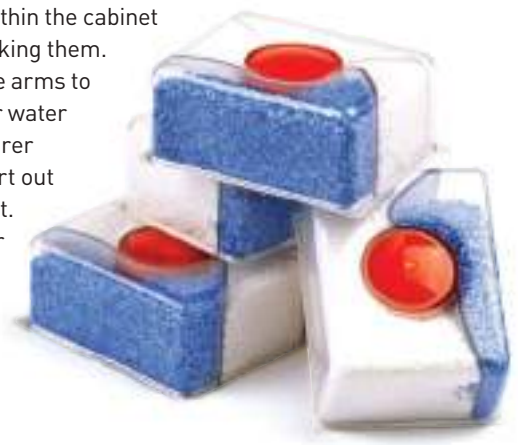
DISHES AREN'T DRY

Opening the door a little right after the program stops aids drying will help with this, as will fully loading your dishwasher – more plates mean more heat and drying ability. Plastic doesn't retain heat, so it won't help with drying. Plastic items can also be quite light and flip during washing, and then fill with water. Some dishwashers have program options that may improve drying but will use more energy. The rinse aid setting may need to be adjusted, or the rinse aid itself refilled.

How you load can affect drying performance. Cups, glasses, pots, bowls or mugs with deep recesses should be loaded on an angle so water can drain out.

DISHES AREN'T CLEAN

- **Detergent** Too much, too little and too old – all can have an effect on how clean your dishes come out. Hard water will affect the amount of detergent you need (as well as salt for your dispenser if needed). Check the manual for precise dosages.
- **Loading** Only wash items that are labelled "dishwasher safe". Once in a while you may need to use a program that's more intensive than normal. Hard, baked-on dirt can be difficult for dishwashers to remove, so experiment with the wash programs to see if they improve results. In some cases, you'll need to soak your pots or pans prior to loading into the dishwasher.
  Where you place your dishes matters. Make sure they avoid shadowing each other which prevents detergent and water from reaching dirty areas. Leaning plates against each other can also create contact points for water and dirt to accumulate. If you can, adjust the basket tines (the vertical spikes that support your dishes) or plate racks to accommodate each plate without touching another. Instruction manuals often come with loading recommendations. Many suggest using the lower basket for pots and pans. Small, light items can bounce around from the pressure of the spray arms during a wash and prevent either the filter from working when they get lodged in it, or the arms themselves.
- **Filter** Every dishwasher has at least one filter, which needs to be cleaned periodically to get rid of dirt. Check the filters to see they're clean and make sure they're fitted correctly when replacing.
- **Spray arms** Check these can turn freely within the cabinet and that no plates or long utensils are blocking them. Some dishwashers allow you to remove the arms to make sure nothing is blocking the holes for water to spray through. Provided your manufacturer advises it, you can dig larger particles of dirt out of the spray arms with a thin, pointed object.
- **Water** Dishwashers often specify the water pressure required to operate effectively.



TOUCH CONTROLS STOP WORKING

Some dishwashers come with touch controls that need only a light touch to activate. If these stop working, it may be that they've been touched too soon after opening. Or, they may need to be wiped over with a damp cloth as they're too dirty and no longer able to recognise touch. It could also be that the child lock controls have been activated. Check your manual for the correct sequence to deactivate these controls.

STAINLESS STEEL

Check for *CHOICE*, Apr 13, for more about these items and why some types of food (mustard, vinegar, lemon, salt and mayonnaise, for example) can leave permanent spots on cutlery if left on stainless steel for a long time. If you're going to leave items for a long time prior to cleaning, scrape off as much food as possible beforehand. Black or grey marks can be created by putting aluminium items in the dishwasher.

SMELLS & CLEANING

Periodically cleaning the filter will help to maintain your dishwasher. Some models have both coarse and fine filters, so remember to clean both. It's also a good idea to wipe over the seals of the dishwasher with a damp cloth and in any corners where dirt and grime can accumulate. Using a higher-temperature program once a month can also help get rid of any smells, and some dishwashers come with a cleaning program. You can also try running a normal program with detergent, but without loading the dishwasher. Using any abrasive cleaners, solvents or scouring cloths on the dishwasher isn't recommended, internally or externally.

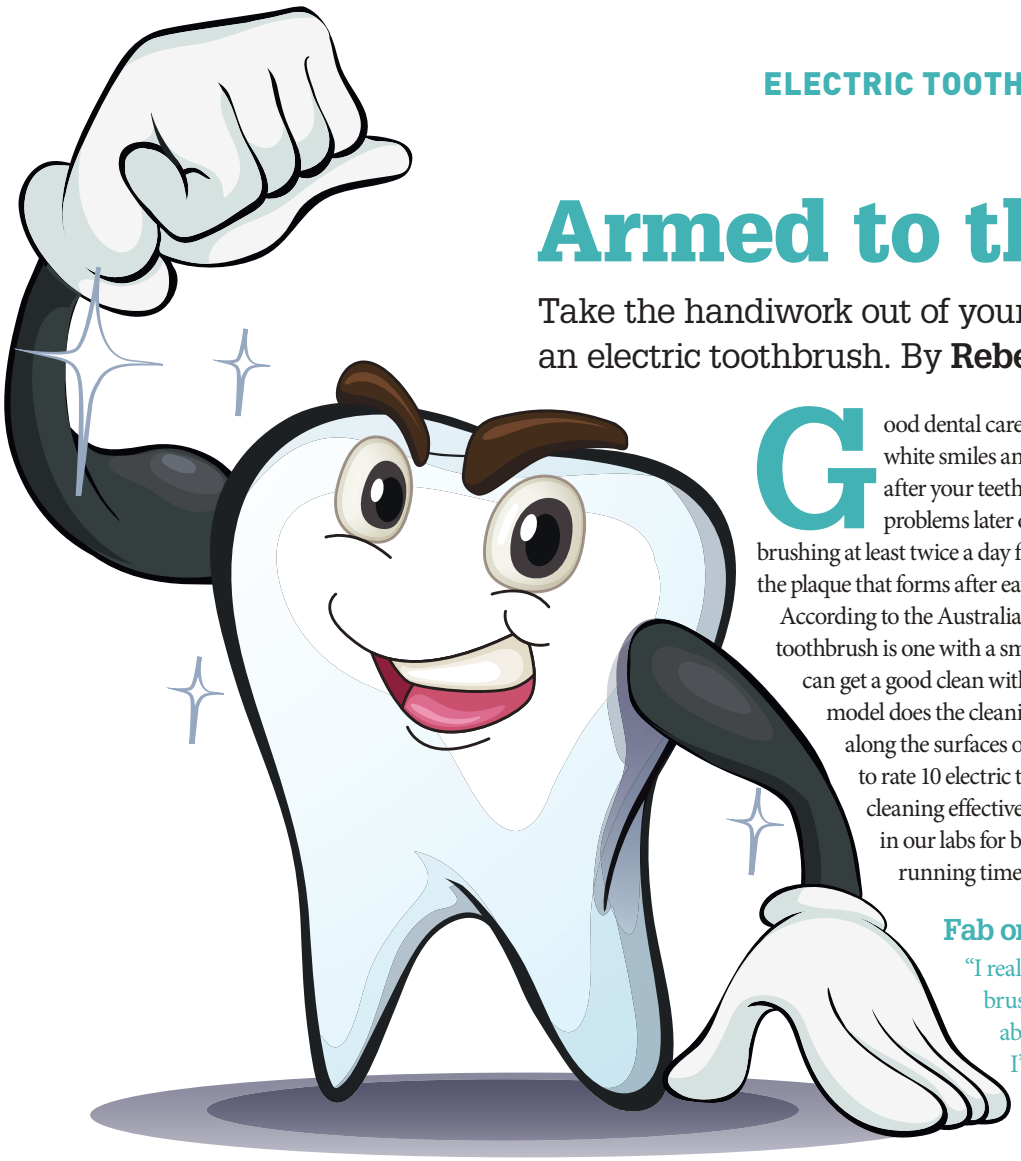
Using a higher-temperature program once a month can help get rid of any smells, and some dishwashers come with a cleaning program

WATER RESIDUE

If there is any water left over in the dishwasher after a wash, check:

- that the filter isn't blocked
- that it's locked into its appropriate place, and/or
- that the pump area is not blocked by any debris.

Also check to see that the drainage hose isn't blocked and that there aren't any kinks in it.If your dishwasher isn't filling with water, check the water inlet tap to see it's turned on and that it isn't blocked or restricted with limescale. This will often have a filter as well, so make sure it's cleaned periodically under running water. Dishwashers are sensitive to water pressure; very low water pressure will mean it may not fill with water. Check with your local water supplier. ■



Armed to the teeth

Take the handiwork out of your brushing regime with an electric toothbrush. By **Rebecca Ciaramidaro**

Good dental care is important not just for Hollywood-white smiles and seminar-friendly breath. Looking after your teeth now will go a long way to reducing problems later down the track. Dentists recommend brushing at least twice a day for about two minutes to help remove the plaque that forms after eating.

According to the Australian Dental Association, the best toothbrush is one with a small head and soft bristles. While you can get a good clean with a manual toothbrush, an electric model does the cleaning for you, so you only need to guide it along the surfaces of your teeth. We recruited 10 triallists to rate 10 electric toothbrushes for ease of use and cleaning effectiveness. A second sample was tested in our labs for battery power, electrical safety, total running time and a shower test, for which all passed.

Fab or drab features?

"I really like the use of the timer when brushing my teeth. I never really think about the time and it made me realise I'm probably not brushing my teeth for long enough."

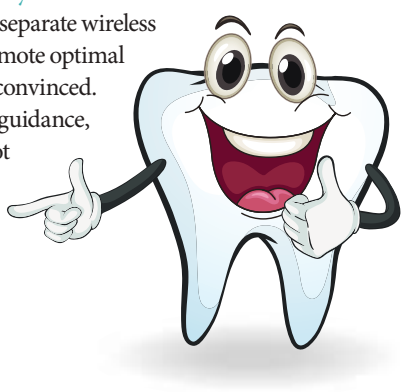
The timer continually came up when triallists were asked which features they found useful. The Oral-B brushes have interval reminders to let you know when to move on to the next section of your teeth. The rest (except the Philips Sonicare PowerUp HX3110/00) have interval reminders, as well as auto-stop function where the toothbrush will turn off after two minutes, regardless of whether you've finished brushing or not. The Philips PowerUp only has the auto-stop function; some found the reminders and auto-stop to be quite annoying.

"I tend to press quite hard when brushing my teeth. With the pressure sensor it stops me from doing so."

Pressure indicators signal when you're brushing too hard, and triallists were impressed with this feature. The Oral-B TriZone 3000, Professional Care 1000 and Triumph 5000 all have this.

"The standalone helper was a complete waste of time – all I needed was a timer which was already built into the toothbrush."

The Oral-B Triumph 5000 has a separate wireless SmartGuide that is said to help promote optimal brushing, but our triallists weren't convinced. While one said it gave some useful guidance, most said the device was "silly", "not very useful" and "just another thing to put batteries in".



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Rechargeable battery Most electric toothbrushes come with a battery pack that you can recharge from the AC adapter.

Charge indicator will alert you when it's time to recharge your toothbrush – useful if you take your brush away on a trip or regularly unplug your charger.

Settings Different speeds easily accessed from the front of the brush can make it easier to choose your preference.

Brush head container/stand is useful for storing multiple brush heads for families or couples who want to use the same main toothbrush unit.

Timer helps you to keep track of how long you're brushing each section of your mouth. Some brushes beep at intervals, others only beep at the end of the cleaning cycle and others will automatically stop at the end of the set cleaning time.

Storage box/travel container will come in handy when you're going away on a business trip or holiday.

Range of heads available for your brush allows you to pick your preference.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

MOST LIKED IMPRESSIVE BRUSHES

★★★★★

Oral-B Professional Care 1000

Triallist comments*

- "Attaching and removing the cleaning head can easily be done with one hand."
- "Aside from the extra effort to reach some of the back teeth properly, it cleaned my teeth well."
- "The indication when too much force was applied was useful."
- "I like the timing 'warning' rather than just turning off."
- "This head was quite large."

★★★★

Oral-B Triumph 5000

Triallist comments*

- "The controls were easy (to understand), though I had to read the instructions to determine what all the different modes were for."
- "This brush cleaned all areas of my teeth and gums very well."
- "I liked the timer and pressure-sensitive light."
- "I liked the deep-clean mode that gives an extra 15 seconds for each section."
- "Quite large compared to others. While the grip at the back of the handle was OK, the shiny, silvery part on the side made the toothbrush slip a bit for me."

★★★★

Oral-B TriZone 3000

Triallist comments*

- "This toothbrush has a red light that goes on if you're pushing too hard on your teeth, which I found helpful."
- "Shape and action of the brush allowed all areas of my teeth and mouth to be reached and cleaned well."
- "It felt good against my gums – like they were getting a good massage."
- "Requires some force to remove the brush head."

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		PERFORMANCE	FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS										
	Price ($)	Overall satisfaction	Battery low indicator	Timer	Extra brushing time option	Pressure indicator	Bristle wear on brush indicator	Storage box / travel container	Toothbrush head container/stand	Number of settings	Number of heads the container/stand holds	Brush action (lateral, circular)	Replaceable heads included with brush
Oral-B Professional Care 1000	160	★★★★★	✓	✓		✓	✓		na	3	na	Both (C)	1
Oral-B Triumph 5000	240	★★★★	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Container	5	4	Both (C)	3
Oral-B TriZone 3000	190	★★★★	✓	✓		✓	✓		Container	3	4	Both (C)	3
Oral-B Vitality TriZone	47	★★★★		✓			✓		na	1	na	Both (C)	1
Colgate ProClinical C600	150	★★★		(A)				✓	Stand	3	2	Multi-directional	2
Colgate ProClinical C200	100	★★★		(A)				✓	Stand	1	2	Multi-directional	1
Philips Sonicare Diamond Clean HX9332/04	300	★★★	✓	(A)	✓		✓	✓	na	5	na	Lateral	2
Philips Sonicare HealthyWhite HX6711/02	170	★★★	✓	(A)	✓		✓		Stand	2	2	Lateral	1
Philips Sonicare PowerUp HX3110/00	60	★★★		(B)					na	1	na	Lateral	1
Colgate ProClinical A1500	200	★★		(A)				✓	Stand	3	2	Multi-directional	3

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK. *TRIALLIST COMMENTS ARE A SELECTION ONLY.

★★★★

Oral-B Vitality TriZone

Best Buy

Triallist comments*

- "Nice and comfortable [to grip]."
- "Nicely balanced, easy to move around [while cleaning your teeth]."
- "Once I got used to the shape I found that the head reached all areas of my teeth very well."
- "Not a fan of the way this brush is designed as toothpaste splatters everywhere when brushing with your lips apart."

ABOUT THE REST

★★★

Colgate ProClinical C600 and C200 These models are light and compact, making them easier to manoeuvre but can also make them unbalanced in the hand. One triallist said they're "not the best for someone with big hands". Accessibility of the controls was mentioned, with triallists saying "the switch was difficult to access when the toothbrush was in my mouth as it is flush and difficult to feel" and "I kept turning it off and on accidentally". Half said these brushes gave slightly strong or very strong vibrations in the mouth. One said that "although the brush itself [of the C200] is reasonably soft, the ends of the bristles are very sharp and pointy".

Philips Sonicare Diamond Clean comes with a travel case that doubles as a charging unit. The main charging unit is a glass cup that the toothbrush sits inside, but take care – you wouldn't want it to drop and smash into a million pieces. Some triallists found the small brush head made it easy to reach all areas of the mouth, while others found the brush head to be stiff. "It's a tad hard to change the mode while holding the toothbrush in my mouth," said one. "If I select the mode without the toothbrush in my mouth the toothpaste and water will splash everywhere". Nine felt the vibrations while cleaning were either slightly or very strong, with one saying, "the high speed vibration made getting into my back teeth difficult". Seven triallists said it was moderately noisy or "high-pitched".

Philips Sonicare HealthyWhite Eight triallists said the vibrations while cleaning were either slightly or very strong. One said "I hated the vibrations on this toothbrush. It was loud, unpleasant and almost painful on my teeth. It made me want to brush for a shorter period of time". Five said it was moderately noisy, one said it was very noisy and a couple commented on the difficulties of figuring out how to attach the head.

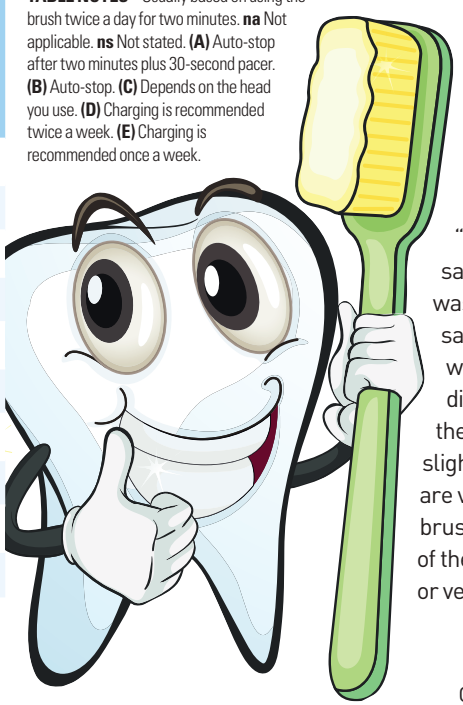
Philips Sonicare PowerUp Eight triallists found this toothbrush to be either very or reasonably quiet. The majority said it was easy to attach and remove the cleaning head but a couple said it was difficult. One said "the size and shape of the head made it easy to clean all tooth surfaces – including the gum line – easily", while another found the cleaning head to be a bit stiff. Five said the vibrations were slightly strong.

★★

Colgate ProClinical A1500 This was the least liked toothbrush. Half our triallists found it somewhat difficult to manoeuvre, mentioning the "bent" handle design, and one said this was "because it felt like it was rattling against my teeth". Nine said it was moderately or very noisy, while four said the controls were difficult to understand. Nine found the vibrations while cleaning to be slightly or very strong – "the vibrations are very unsettling if the back of the brush head contacts your teeth instead of the bristles". Eight said it felt slightly or very harsh against the gums. ■

USING THE TABLE All toothbrushes on test have rechargeable batteries. **Price** Recommended retail, as of Apr 14. **Features** See What to Look For, page 55. **TABLE NOTES** * Usually based on using the brush twice a day for two minutes. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** Auto-stop after two minutes plus 30-second pacer. **(B)** Auto-stop. **(C)** Depends on the head you use. **(D)** Charging is recommended twice a week. **(E)** Charging is recommended once a week.

Battery stated usage time (days) *	Continuous operating time (min)	Weight (g)	Cost of replacement heads ($, per head)	Number of replacement heads per pack	Country of manufacture	Contact
7	56	132	6.90	4	Germany	oralb.com.au
10	62	171	13.50	2	Germany	oralb.com.au
7	56	132	9.40	4	Germany	oralb.com.au
5	41	113	9.40	4	China	oralb.com.au
(D)	82	61	7.50	4	China	colgate.com.au
(D)	84	60	7.50	4	China	colgate.com.au
21	123	139	15	2	China	philips.com.au
ns	145	144	10	3	China	philips.com.au
ns	169	138	10	3	China	philips.com.au
(E)	38	98	7.5	4	China	colgate.com.au



Take it slow

There's something heart-warming about coming home to a hot, readymade meal, says **Martha Psiroukis**

Slow cooking is on the rise – surely a sign we're drawn to things that save us valuable time and effort for more important things. Our latest round of testing adds seven new slow cookers to those previously tested, with four making our What to Buy list (see right).

The slow cooker you choose depends on how many hungry tummies you're cooking for. A family will need at least a 5.5L or larger-capacity model, but if you're only cooking for two, a smaller 3-5L will suffice. But if you like to cook extra for lunch the following day, opt for a larger model.

For minimal cleaning up, consider models that allow you to sear ingredients using the slow cooker's inner pan on the stovetop, or directly in the slow cooker. Check out the table (page 60) to find out which ones have this nifty function.

For info on how we test, see **choice.com.au/slow-cookers**

Nutshell

- Slow cookers are the next best thing to having your own personal chef at home.
- We find three newly tested small slow cookers and one larger model to recommend.

Hot stuff!

The outside of a slow cooker (particularly one with a stainless steel exterior or that can sear) is hot enough to burn you if you touch it while it's cooking, so take extra care with these types. We'd like to see all future slow cookers designed with better insulation, which will also help reduce their energy use.

WHAT TO BUY

FAMILY SIZE

83%

Russell Hobbs Searing Slow Cooker RHSC650

Good points

- Excellent for low-temperature cooking
- Good for high-temperature cooking
- Bowl and lid are suitable for fridge
- Easy-to-clean non-stick bowl
- Comprehensive instructions with recipes
- Lightweight cooking bowl is suitable for searing and sautéing, non-stick and easy to clean
- Pan can be used on gas or electric stovetops (but not induction)
- Touch controls easy to use with digital display and timer

Bad points

- Cooking bowl handles can become very hot on the stove top
- Not suitable for the dishwasher

The recommended newly tested models are profiled here. For profiles of previously tested models, refer to the *CHOICE* issue indicated in the Previously Recommended list.

SMALL

82%
Maxim NSC-5OSS

Good points
- Excellent for high-temperature cooking
- Very good for low-temperature cooking
- Bowl is suitable for the fridge

Bad points
- Residue can remain on the ceramic bowl and be difficult to remove
- Cooking bowl has small handles with no grip, can be difficult to lift with a load
- Lid isn't suitable for the fridge
- Not suitable for the dishwasher
- Large cooking bowl is awkward to wash in a domestic sink

81%
Kambrook KSC360

Good points
- Excellent for low-temperature cooking
- Good for high-temperature cooking
- Bowl and lid are suitable for the dishwasher and fridge
- Comprehensive instructions with recipes
- Small, oval unit is easy to store

Bad points
- Cooking bowl has small handles with no grip, can be difficult to lift with a load
- Residue can remain on the ceramic bowl and be difficult to remove

80%
Kambrook KSC450

Good points
- Excellent for low-temperature cooking
- Good for high-temperature cooking
- Bowl and lid are suitable for the dishwasher and fridge
- Comprehensive instructions with recipes

Bad points
- Cooking bowl has small handles with no grip, can be difficult to lift with a load
- Residue can remain on the ceramic bowl and be difficult to remove
- Medium cooking bowl can be awkward to wash in a domestic sink

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

FAMILY SIZE / FOR LEFTOVERS (5.5L+)

88% Sunbeam SecretChef Electronic Sear and Slow P8555 (May 12)	5.5L	$199
87% Target Essentials Slow Cooker TESSC60 (May 13)	6L	$29
85% Breville The Flavour Maker BSC560 (Mar 11)	7L	$150
85% Kenwood Multi Cooker CP657 (Mar 11)	6.5L	$70
85% Sunbeam SecretChef Slow Cooker HP5520 (May 12)	5.5L	$70
82% Cuisinart Brushed Stainless Programmable Slow Cooker PSC-650A (May 12)	6.5L	$199
82% Sunbeam SecretChef Banquet Slow Cooker HP6000 (May 13)	6L	$80
80% George Foreman Slow Cooker GFSC60BLK (May 12)	6L	$50

SMALL CAPACITY (3-5L)

85% Morphy Richards Healthy Living Digital Slow Cooker 48730 (May 12)	6.5L*	$120
83% Breville The Flavour Maker BSC500 (May 12)	5L	$150
82% Kambrook Essentials Slow Cooker KSC320 (May 13)	3L	$30
82% Sunbeam Slow Cooker HP4520 (May 13)	4.5L	$60
81% Cuisinart Programmable Slow Cooker PSC-400A (May 13)	4L	$149

0.9-1.7kW
Energy use for cooking in a slow cooker (8hrs at low heat)

0.5-1.1kW
Energy use for cooking in an electric oven (1hr)

(Month and year refers to *CHOICE* issue in which the model was first profiled) *Maximum working capacity is 4.5L.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance – low setting (%)	Cooking performance – high setting (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Auto setting	Cooking bowl suitable for dishwasher/fridge	Timer	Searing function	Cooking bowl type	Shape	Claimed capacity (L)
Sunbeam SecretChef Electronic Sear and Slow Cooker HP8555	199	88	100	90	77		✓/✓	✓	✓	Non-stick	O (G)	5.5
Target Essentials Slow Cooker TESSC60	29	87	100	95	70		✓/✓			Ceramic	O	6
Breville The Flavour Maker BSC560	150	85	90	90	77	✓	✓/✓		✓	Non-stick (F)	R	7
Kenwood Multi Cooker CP657	70	85	100	90	70	✓	-/✓			Ceramic	O	6.5
Morphy Richards Healthy Living Digital Slow Cooker 48730	120	85	100 (A)	90 (A)	70		✓/✓	✓		Ceramic	O	6.5 (H)
Sunbeam SecretChef Slow Cooker HP5520	70	85	100	90	70		(C)/✓			Ceramic	O	5.5
Breville The Flavour Maker BSC500	100	83	80	90	80	✓	(D)/✓		✓	Non-stick (F)	O	5
• **Russell Hobbs** Searing Slow Cooker RHSC650	100	83	100	70	80		-/✓	✓	✓	Non-stick	O	6
Cuisinart Brushed Stainless Programmable Slow Cooker PSC-650A	199	82	100	90	63		✓/✓	✓		Ceramic	O (G)	6.5
Kambrook Essentials Slow Cooker KSC320	30	82	100	65	80		✓/✓			Ceramic	O	3
• **Maxim** NSC-50SS	40	82	80	100	70	✓	-/✓(D)			Ceramic	RO	5
Sunbeam SecretChef Banquet Slow Cooker HP6000	80	82	80	100	70		✓/✓			Ceramic	O	6
Sunbeam Slow Cooker HP4520	60	82	100	80	70		✓/✓			Ceramic	O	4.5
Cuisinart Programmable Slow Cooker PSC-400A	149	81	100	80	67		✓/✓	✓		Ceramic	O (G)	4
• **Kambrook** KSC360	40	81	100	70	75		✓/✓	✓		Ceramic	O	3
George Foreman Slow Cooker GFSC60BLK	50	80	100	70	73	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	6
• **Kambrook** KSC450	50	80	100	70	73	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	4.5
Breville The Smart Temp Programmable with Temperature IQ BSC420	100	79	80	90	70		✓/✓	✓		Ceramic	O	6
Morphy Richards Flavour Savour 48787	170	79	100	80	62		✓/✓	✓	✓	Stainless steel	RO	6.5 (J)
Tiffany Slow Cooker SC30W	40	79	70	85	80		✓/✓			Ceramic	RO	3
Tiffany Slow Cooker SC65SS	59	79	90	80	70	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	6.5
Kambrook Stainless Slow Cooker KSC110	60	76	90	70	70	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	6
• **Maxim** NSC-35OSS	35	76	80	70	77	✓	-/✓(D)			Ceramic	O	3.5
Kambrook Super Sear Slow Cooker KSC700	100	75	80	65	77	✓	✓/✓		✓	Non-stick	O	5
Russell Hobbs RHSC600	70	75	80	75 (B)	70	✓	-/-			Ceramic	O	6
George Foreman GFSC35	40	74	80	60 (B)	80	✓	-/✓			Ceramic	O	3.5
Sunbeam Electronic Slow Cooker HP5590	90	73	90	60	70		✓/✓	✓		Ceramic	O	5.5
Tefal Slow Cooker	70	73	60	90	70	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	5.5
• **Kambrook** KSC120	60	72	80	70	68	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	6
Crock-Pot HP1350 Slow Cooker	50	70	70	65	73		✓/✓			Ceramic	O	3.5
Crock-Pot The Original Slow Cooker HP1550	70	70	90	50	70		✓/✓			Ceramic	O	5.5
Russell Hobbs Slow Cooker 4443BSS	60	68	60	65	77	✓	✓/✓			Ceramic	O	3.5
• **Kambrook** KMC200	70	65	70	50	72		(E)/✓		✓	Non-stick	O	3.5

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of May 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of cooking performance – low setting (30%); cooking performance – high setting (30%) and ease of use (40%). on low temperature cooking for eight hours per day, three days a week at 26c/kWh. ****** Based on high temperature cooking for five hours per day, three days a week at 26c/kWh. **(A)** The Morphy Richards only has one previously tested models used a soup recipe instead of chilli shredded beef, but scores are comparable. **(C)** Suitable for dishwasher but not recommended. **(D)** Lid only. **(E)** Except lid. **(F)** Cast aluminium with non-stick Maximum working capacity is 5L. **O** Oval. **R** Rectangle. **RO** Round.

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Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Weight (g)	Running cost/year cooking on low ($)*	Running cost/year cooking on high ($)**	Contact
48 x 29 x 32	5.5	51	33	sunbeam.com.au
41 x 25 x 31	5.5	66	59	target.com.au
47 x 28 x 23	4.8	68	66	breville.com.au
43 x 25 x 32	5.6	74	61	kenwood-australia.com
43 x 27 x 30	5.8	69	51	morphyrichards.com.au
45 x 20 x 29	5.9	67	56	sunbeam.com.au
45 x 24 x 28	4.0	49	41	breville.com.au
39 x 25 x 26	2.9	43	32	au.russellhobbs.com
43 x 27 x 31	7.6	46	43	cuisinart.com.au
34 x 23 x 25	3.6	42	30	kambrook.com.au
34 x 26 x 31	5.6	50	66	maximhousewares.com
46 x 28 x 31	6.4	49	57	sunbeam.com.au
38 x 31 x 31	5.1	69	42	sunbeam.com.au
39 x 25 x 29	5.4	35	42	cuisinart.com.au
33 x 23 x 23	3.7	42	29	kambrook.com.au
42 x 24 x 31	5.7	69	59	salton.com.au
37 x 24 x 27	4.7	56	36	kambrook.com.au
44 x 27 x 31	6.1	60	46	breville.com.au
40 x 29 x 29	3.5	43	26	morphyrichards.com.au
27 x 28 x 24	3.2	37	38	gafcontrol.com.au
41 x 24 x 32	5.3	53	65	gafcontrol.com.au
42 x 28 x 32	5.9	77	48	kambrook.com.au
33 x 22 x 24	3.8	38	37	maximhousewares.com
40 x 27 x 28	3.8	48	36	kambrook.com.au
41 x 24 x 30	5.6	51	63	salton.com.au
34 x 22 x 25	3.6	43	34	salton.com.au
43 x 29 x 31	6.3	70	54	sunbeam.com.au
41 x 28 x 31	4.9	37	39	tefal.com.au
40 x 28 x 29	5.7	54	52	kambrook.com.au
40 x 26 x 28	4.8	48	41	bigw.com.au
44 x 26 x 31	5.9	67	57	bigw.com.au
34 x 22 x 25	3.5	29	28	salton.com.au
36 x 25 x 28	3.2	36	13	kambrook.com.au

Features see What to Look for, right. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. * Based temperature setting, which we used for both performance tests. **(B)** These coating. **(G)** Square housing. **(H)** Maximum working capacity is 4.5L. **(J)**

ABOUT THE REST

The **Maxim NSC-350SS** is small, cheap to buy and a good performer overall, but its stainless steel exterior needs extra effort to keep clean.

The **Kambrook KSC120**'s large cooking bowl has small handles with no grip, so it can be difficult to lift when full. It's also awkward to wash in a domestic sink or fit it in a dishwasher. The stainless steel exterior needs extra effort to keep clean, and its indicator light is small.

The small 3.5L **Kambrook KMC200** is one of the few models that can sear in the slow cooker. It also sautés, steams and cooks rice (steam rack, rice measuring cup and spoon are supplied), but its searing surface area is small so you may need to do this in batches. Its non-stick aluminium inner pan is easy to clean, but its stainless steel exterior is not. It's good for low temperature cooking, but it doesn't have a high temperature setting, so foods you'd normally cook on high heat, such as chilli beef, will need eight hours to cook. Both Kambrook models have comprehensive instructions and recipes.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Size Consider how much food you expect to cook, the cupboard space required for storage and bench space for usage.

Controls Look for bright indicator lights and a control switch that's easy to access and is clearly labelled.

Exterior There should be few or no cracks or crevices in which food can get trapped.

Cleaning Each part should be easy to clean. A stainless steel exterior may show fingerprints and large cooking bowls can be awkward to clean in the sink or fit in the dishwasher.

Timer is handy as it counts down the time on your slow cooker and then alerts you when cooking is finished. Don't confuse this with a delayed start timer, which we don't recommend – if you use one of these, the food can end up sitting at room temperature and breed bacteria.

Automatic setting starts the process on high to bring the food up to temperature and then switches to low temperature for the remaining cooking time. ■

Excess baggage

A car roof box may be just the ticket to reclaiming some space and comfort for the next family road trip, explains **Graham Byrne**

Imagine an aeroplane with no overhead storage. The aisle would be blocked, legroom compromised and if the plane hit turbulence – well, things could get ugly.

Although it may seem a far-fetched comparison, this is not unlike what many people do when packing the car up for a camping holiday or road trip. If it can't be stuffed into the boot, chances are it will end up in a footwell, on a seat or in someone's lap. The consequences can be a long, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous journey. A car roof box, sometimes called a luggage box or roof pod, is designed to fit onto the roof bars of a car and help resolve storage space shortages.

Moving some of the clutter into a roof box can also be good for your safety and sanity. Your rear vision may improve, and the risk of objects flying around the cabin in the event of an accident will be greatly reduced. And not having to contend with kayak paddles or fishing rods poking you in the back will almost certainly ensure you arrive at your destination in a much better frame of mind.

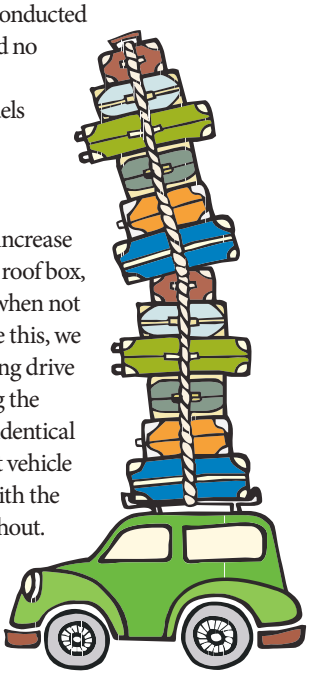
The car roof boxes we looked at range from 395L to 460L. They're popular mid-size pods suitable for general storage and can fit most vehicles. There are other various shapes and sizes on the market, some with more specialised designs for carrying skis or other sports equipment. We score the roof boxes on ease of fitting to the roof bars, loading and locking. We then check the largest box for its effect on fuel consumption. We conducted noise tests too, but found no measureable difference between any of the models on test.

Nutshell

- We test five different brands of car roof boxes priced between $449 and $829.
- Car roof boxes can improve both capacity and safety.

Fuel economics

Fuel consumption will increase markedly when using a roof box, so it's best to remove it when not needed. To demonstrate this, we took our test car on a long drive at highway speeds along the same route, and under identical test conditions. Our test vehicle used 12.1% more fuel with the roof box fitted than without.



WHAT TO BUY

83%
Thule Motion 200

Good points
- Very easy to fit the box to the roof bars
- The lock/lid access is from both sides, which means the load can be accessed away from the road/cars going past
- Reasonably wide box, so loading/unloading is fairly easy
- Lid is easy to close
- Has three straps to secure the load

Bad points
- Has three locking mechanisms on the inside that can catch on the load

83%
Yakima Rocketbox Pro 14

Good points
- Very easy to fit the box to the roof bars
- The lock/lid access is from both the driver and passenger sides, which means the load can be accessed away from the road/cars going past
- Reasonably wide box, so loading/unloading is fairly easy
- Lid is easy to close

Bad points
- Has three locking mechanisms on the inside that can catch on the load

What to look for

Installation You have a choice between basic U-bolt systems and "claw" style attachments. The claw attachments are quicker, and make mounting and removing the box much easier. The box must be compatible with the roof bars you intend to use. Check the shape, width and distance between bars. A box that is too big or the wrong shape can interfere with rear hatch or wagon opening.

Narrow boxes can be difficult to reach, particularly on wider or taller vehicles. Boxes that **open from both sides** offer the most flexibility and practicality. Boxes that open from the driver's side only present a hazard if you can't pull off the road.

Roof boxes have **load ratings**. Make sure you choose one that will safely hold the weight of your luggage.

Use the roof box for lighter items and put heavier items in the boot. This will have less impact on your car's centre of gravity and also make items easier to stow and retrieve.

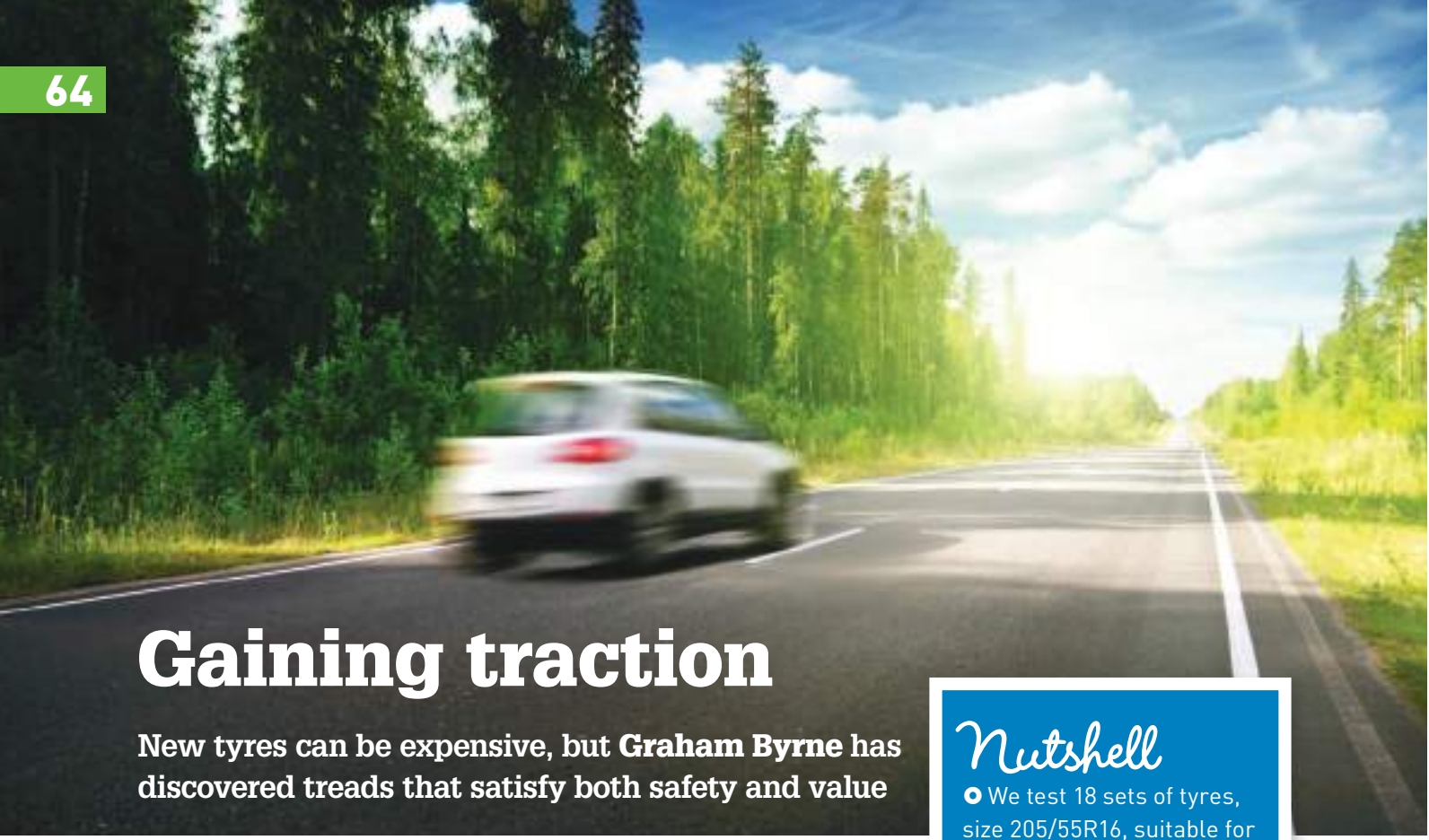
Secure items inside the box with straps to prevent movement of and possible damage to your cargo.

Don't use an automated car wash if you have a roof box fitted. ■

		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS						
	Price ($)	Total ease of use score (%)	Loading / unloading score (%)	Ease of fitting to roof bars score (%)	Lid opening / lock score (%)	Locking side	Load securing devices	Dimensions (cm, L x W x H)	Weight (kg)	Claimed volume (L)	Claimed maximum load (kg)	Contact
Thule Motion 200	829	83	70	90	100	Driver / passenger	Three straps	175 x 86 x 46	16	410	75	thule.com.au
Yakima Rocketbox Pro 14	549	83	70	90	100	Driver / passenger	None	188 x 84 x 41	17.2	395	75	yakima.com.au
Carfit Travel Twin 460	649	78	60	90	100	Driver / passenger	Two straps	194 x 71 x 48	13	460	75	tcag.com.au
Rhino Rack RMF400	595	73	50	90	100	Driver / passenger	Two straps	178 x 78 x 42	14.5	400	75	rhinorack.com.au
Prorack Exploro 4	449	66	80	50	55	Driver	None	142 x 97 x 38	15	425	75	whispbar.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of March 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of loading/unloading (50%), ease of fitting to roof bars (25%) and lock/lid opening (25%).

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK



Gaining traction

New tyres can be expensive, but Graham Byrne has discovered treads that satisfy both safety and value

Nutshell

- We test 18 sets of tyres, size 205/55R16, suitable for a number of popular small or medium cars such as the Toyota Corolla, Mazda 3 and Hyundai i30.
- Tyre price or brand is not necessarily an indicator of safety – you can buy good performance and peace of mind without a hefty outlay.

Maintaining a vehicle is expensive at the best of times – and not just to fuel and service. Once depreciation, registration and insurance are factored in, even the cheapest car to run will cost its owner an average of almost $100 a week, according to the NRMA. It's no wonder, then, that price is a major consideration when purchasing a new set of tyres.

The tyres in our latest test of 205/55R16 models range in price from $107 to $206, so there are substantial savings to be had by buying cheaper models. But when it comes to safety, do you really want to put your life and those of your passengers at risk for the sake of a few dollars?

Thankfully, you don't have to. Our best-performing tyre on test is also one of the least expensive (see table on page 66), while some of the more expensive and recognisable brands wallow around the middle of the pack.

Shop around

When shopping for new tyres it's worth trying all the available retailers in your area. Make sure you've also decided on the make and model of tyre you want before you start, and don't let yourself be swayed by salespeople. Tyre retailers have affiliations with certain manufacturers and will often try to sell their preferred brands or push their own agenda. This means prices can vary greatly between stores, as we experienced first-hand when we bought tyres for this test. One supplier was unable to sell us a certain make of tyre at the recommended retail price simply because a competitor down the road was the favoured retailer for that brand.

When shopping for new tyres it's worth trying all the available retailers in your area

On a roll

The fuel bill can be a big chunk of the weekly household finances, and with the recent federal Budget announcements, petrol prices look set to rise even further. While vehicle manufacturers have been developing more fuel efficient cars for decades, tyre makers are now also creating products that claim to reduce fuel use via lowering rolling resistance by up to 10%.

Although this sounds wonderful, the reality is there are no single consistent methods currently used by manufacturers to test rolling resistance, and no standard point of comparison by which to make these claims. Essentially, tyre makers design their own tests and choose the test parameters. And while there's nothing inherently wrong or deceptive in this, it does make direct comparison of rolling resistance claims impossible. This is the reason we've developed our own method for determining rolling resistance alongside our regular cornering and braking tests.

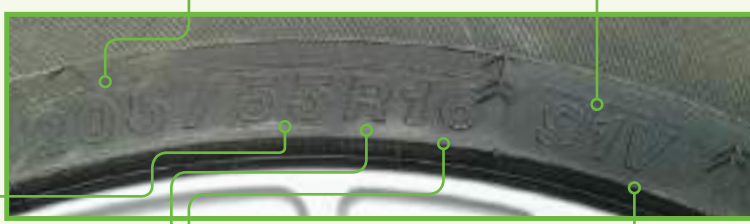
For each set of tyres on test we measure the distance it takes to roll to a stop from a starting speed of 25km/h. This is completed five times and the shortest and longest measured distances are discarded. The three remaining measured distances are then averaged. The best performer for this test, the Kumho, rolled an average of 33 metres (22.9%) further than the worst performer, the Blue Streak.

In the second part of the test, we take these two sets of tyres on a long drive (255km) under identical test conditions at highway speeds, and measure the fuel consumption. Under these conditions, the Kumho tyres used 6.30L/100km or 4.1% less fuel than the Blue Streak at 6.56L/100km. Assuming a fuel cost of $1.50/L, our Toyota Corolla test car fitted with the Kumhos would save its owner 40.5c per 100km compared with the Blue Streak. According to a recent ABS study of motor vehicle use, the average Australian car travels 14,000km per year, so in this scenario, the Corolla driver would save $56.70 in one year. If you drive a less fuel efficient vehicle or travel longer distances, you could save even more.

How to read a tyre

Tyre size Each tyre has standard markings that allow you to pick the right size and type for your car. It's a confusing mix of letters and numbers, and of measurements in millimetres and inches. Here's what it all means, using the code for the size on test – **205/55R16 91V:**

- **205** is the section width (in mm) when the tyre is fitted to the recommended rim, inflated to the recommended pressure and not under load. The section width is the distance between the tyre's exterior sidewalls.
- **55** is a percentage describing the tyre's profile or aspect ratio. It's the ratio between the tyre's section height (distance from the wheel bead seat to the top of the tyre) and its section width – in this case, 55%.
- **R** stands for radial, which is the most common construction method for passenger car tyres.
- **16** refers to the diameter (in inches) of the rim the tyre should be fitted to.
- **91** is the load rating index, which tells you the maximum weight one tyre can carry (in this case, 615kg). Other examples: 89 (580kg), 94 (670kg), 95 (690kg) and 96 (710kg).
- **V** is the speed rating index and tells you the maximum speed at which the tyre can travel (in this case, 240km/h). Other examples: S (180km/h), T (190km/h), H (210km/h) and W (270km/h).



HOW INFLATION AFFECTS TREAD-TO-ROAD CONTACT

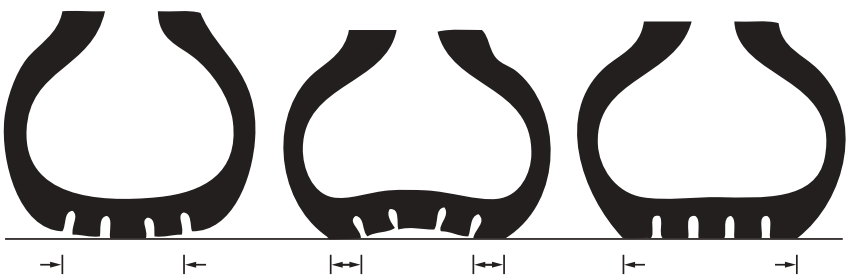


IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

PRESSURE POINTS

- Tyre pressure is measured in pounds per square inch (psi) or kilopascals (kPa).
- Keep your tyres inflated to the pressure recommended by the car manufacturer – usually shown on a sticker inside the driver's doorframe, in the glove box or on the petrol tank flap.
- The car manufacturer's recommendations refer to the pressure when the tyre's cold, not after you've been driving for some time – so check at the petrol station down the road, not halfway through your journey.
- When driving with a heavy load such as a trailer, inflate your tyres to a higher pressure – check the sticker.
- Driving with under-inflated tyres uses more petrol, adversely affects your car's handling and may lead to tyre damage.
- Check the pressure regularly – make it a habit each time you fill up.
- Don't forget to check the spare's air pressure when you do the other tyres.

WHAT TO BUY

85%
Maxxis Victra Asymmet M35

79%
GT Radial Champiro BAX2

ABOUT THE REST

We test tyres in fairly extreme situations that you'd normally only encounter in an emergency. In dry, everyday driving conditions the differences indicated by our scores may not be as noticeable. But performance in emergencies or wet weather conditions is what really counts. Some poorer performers under these circumstances are downright dangerous. Our recommended tyres will help you keep better control of your car and could mean the difference between a scare and an accident. ■

THANK YOU

We'd like to thank Morgan Park Raceway in Warwick, Qld, for ensuring a smooth test, and Toyota Australia for providing the Corolla test car.

		PERFORMANCE						SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price per tyre ($)	Overall score (%)	Dry cornering (%, 80 & 85 km/h)	Wet cornering (%, 75 & 80 km/h)	Dry braking (%, 50 & 80 km/h)	Wet braking (%, 50 & 80 km/h)	Rolling resistance (%)	Speed rating	Special design	Contact
Maxxis Victra Asymmet M35	119	85	90	90	95	70	70	W	Outside / inside	maxxistyres.com.au
GT Radial Champiro BAX2	135	79	80	80	85	70	75	V	Outside / inside	gtradial.com.au
Yokohama BluEarth AE01	153	78	75	75	95	65	80	V		yokohama.com.au
Bridgestone Potenza Adrenalin RE002	199	76	80	65	95	65	75	W	Outside / inside	bridgestone.com.au
Ovation Performance DSRT VI-388	125	75	80	70	85	65	75	W	Outside / inside	ovationtyres.com.au
Hankook Optimo K415	119	74	75	70	90	60	75	H		hankooktyre.com.au
Nokian V T441946	179	74	80	70	85	60	75	V	Outside / inside	nokiantyresaustralia.com
Achilles ATR Sport	107	73	75	60	95	65	70	W	Directional	achillesradial.com
Goodyear Assurance TripleMax	169	73	75	65	80	65	85	V		goodyear.com.au
Michelin Energy XM2	206	73	80	70	80	55	80	V	Outside / inside	michelin.com.au
Toyo Teo Plus	165	69	75	60	80	60	75	V		toyotires.com.au
Blue Streak Stiletto Sport	149	68	80	45	90	60	70	V	Directional	goodyear.com.au
Pirelli Cinturato P1	150	68	70	60	85	55	75	V	Outside / inside	pirelli.com.au
Continental ContiComfortContact CC5	185	67	75	50	80	60	75	V	Outside / inside	continental-tyres.com.au
Firestone TZ700	139	66	75	45	85	55	75	V		bridgestone.com.au
Kumho Ecowing ES01 KH27	165	64	65	50	80	50	90	H	Outside / inside	kumho.com.au
Nexen Classe Premiere CP661a	119	61	65	45	75	50	80	H		int.nexentire.com
Sumitomo Tour Plus LSH	139	61	75	45	80	35	75	H	Outside / inside	sumitomocorp.com.au

TABLE NOTES Price per tyre Recommended retail, as of March 2014. Tyre prices can vary considerably depending on the store or where you live, so shop around. **Scores** The overall score is made up of cornering (25% dry, 25% wet), braking (20% dry, 20% wet) and rolling resistance (10%). The weighting for cornering is higher because you're more likely to take a fast corner than make an emergency braking. **Speed/load ratings and special designs** See How to Read a Tyre, page 65.

Hot or not?

Heating performance and efficiency don't always go hand in hand, as **Chris Barnes** discovers

An electric heater may not be the most efficient way to warm a room, but there's nothing like a cold snap to make you forget that and bask in its rosy glow – at least until the next electricity bill comes in. That's when you might wish you'd opted for a blanket and hot water bottle instead.

Reverse-cycle air conditioners and gas heaters are much more energy efficient for the amount of heating they can deliver, but portable electric heaters generally cost much less to buy and can certainly be a good option for small spaces or occasional use. While we can't predict how much a heater will cost you to run – that depends on factors such as your room size and insulation – our table (page 68) does show which of the models on test are efficient at heating. Most are OK in this respect, but we've found some that are better, and a few that are worse.

Good heating performance and good energy efficiency don't always go together. A heater may be great at heating but only OK for efficiency, meaning it will heat the room effectively but cost more to run. Some are efficient but only OK performers, so they don't heat the room as effectively, but at least they use less power. Sadly, we've found a few that are not only weak at heating, but use a comparatively large amount of power too. Unsurprisingly, these are towards the bottom of our table.

The recommended Dyson and DeLonghi models (page 69) heated our test chamber more effectively, quickly and evenly than the rest. These models have fans, which help distribute the heat faster and more evenly; the DeLonghi can also be used without the fan on for quieter heating.

CALL US TODAY
choice
SHOPPER
1300 360 655

Nutshell

- Ten new electric heaters on test, one of which is recommended.
- Some heaters are effective and comparatively energy efficient, while others prove to be poor in both respects.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Fan allows for much quicker and more even heat distribution, but may also be noisy.

Thermostat This maintains an ideal constant room temperature (within the heater's capacity), and should have a control that's easy to read and set. Most models on test have one. Some have a simple range of heat settings (for example, numbered one to three, or low/medium/high), while others have a sliding scale or allow you to set a target temperature for the room.

Frost watch may be useful for colder climates, as it claims to maintain a temperature of about 5°C if the thermostat is left on its lowest setting, avoiding frost. (We don't test this feature.)

Timer allows you to set the heater to run at set times or

		PERFORMANCE							FEATURES						
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Heating (%)	Ease of use (%)	kWh over 120 min	Safety tests	Comparative energy efficiency*	Heater type	Frost watch	Timer	Thermal cut-out	Thermostat	Tilt switch	Heat without fan on	Fan-only option
• **Dyson** Hot + Cool AM05	599	79	85	64	3.7	Pass	Good	Tower fan	✓(A)		✓	✓	✓		✓
DeLonghi HCS2552FTS	149	70	77	52	4.4	Pass	OK	Convector	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Atlantic Tatou Digital RYHGH-ATL2	595	67	71	56	3.8	Pass	OK	Panel convector	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	na
DeLonghi TCH7092ER	169	67	65	70	4.6	Pass	Good	Ceramic fan heater	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
• **DeLonghi** HS25F	59	64	72	44	4.4	Pass	OK	Convector	✓		ns	✓	ns		
• **Mistral** MCVHA2000	40	64	67	58	3.8	Pass	OK	Convector			✓	✓	ns	na	na
Noirot 7358-8T	649	64	74	42	4.1	Fail	Good	Panel convector		✓	✓	✓		na	na
• **Kambrook** KRH300	100	63	68	50	4.4	Fail	OK	Convector/radiant			✓	✓	✓	na	na
Omega Altise OAE24ET	529	62	73	36	4.3	Pass	OK	Panel convector	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	na
• **Goldair** GMH500	200	61	54	76	3.7	Fail	OK	Micathermic		✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
Rinnai JEPH22DTW	380	61	68	46	3.9	Pass	Good	Panel convector	✓	✓	ns	✓	✓	na	na
Sunbeam HE2105	90	61	59	66	3.7	Pass	Good	Ceramic fan heater			✓	✓	✓		✓
Omega Altise OCON20F	55	60	59	62	3.5	Pass	OK	Convector	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
• **Abode** ACVHA2000TR	49	59	60	56	3.6	Pass	OK	Convector		✓	✓	✓(C)	ns	✓	
• **Heller** OIL11T	90	59	54	70	2.5	Pass	OK	Oil column		✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
Sunbeam HE4100	129	59	54	70	3.5	Pass	OK	Convector			✓	✓	✓	na	na
• **Arlec** MTH9	99	58	52	72	4.2	Pass	OK	Micathermic	✓(B)	✓	✓	✓	ns	na	na
Atlantic Artisan 519622	395	57	64	41	4.0	Pass	OK	Panel convector	✓		ns	✓		na	na
Dimplex OFC2400TIF	190	57	59	53	3.0	Pass	OK	Oil column	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Everdure HPE222W	179	57	59	52	3.9	Pass	OK	Panel convector	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
Omega Altise OMP24E	199	57	58	54	4.4	Pass	OK	Panel convector	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
Atlantic Artisan 519627	427	56	60	46	4.2	Pass	OK	Panel convector	✓		✓	✓		na	na
• **DeLonghi** Dragon 4 TRD42400MT	299	55	56	52	4.4	Pass	OK	Oil column	✓	✓	ns	✓	✓	na	na
Dimplex OFRC24TIB	210	55	53	58	3.2	Pass	Borderline	Oil-free column	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
Everdure HPE221W	199	55	62	40	3.8	Pass	OK	Panel convector		✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
DeLonghi HCM2030	39	54	55	52	3.8	Pass	OK	Convector	✓		✓	✓		na	na
Kambrook KOH111	100	52	50	58	2.7	Pass	Borderline	Oil column	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
Dimplex OFRC24ECCB	250	50	53	42	3.3	Pass	OK	Oil column	✓	✓	ns	✓	✓	na	na
Noirot 7358-7T	599	48	50	42	3.5	Pass	OK	Panel convector	ns	✓	✓	✓	ns	na	na
Omega Altise OMC24E1	179	45	37	62	4.5	Fail	Poor	Micathermic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na
• **Prima** PYLB1511T	70	44	43	46	1.9	Pass	OK	Oil column		✓	✓	✓	✓	na	na

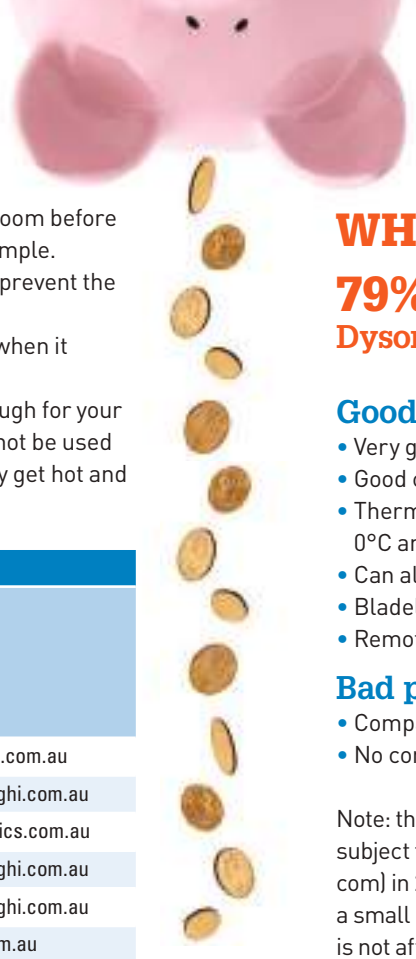
periods – useful to heat up the room before you get back from work, for example.

Thermal cut-out is designed to prevent the heater from overheating.

Tilt switch turns the heater off when it falls over.

Cord length should be long enough for your needs. Electric heaters should not be used with an extension cord, as it may get hot and pose a fire hazard.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK



SPECIFICATIONS

Heat settings	Heating power max (W)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**	Weight (kg)**	Cord length (m)**	Cord storage	Contact
1 (D)	ns	58 x 15 x 15	2.5	1.8		dyson.com.au
3	2000	46 x 76 x 15	5.6	2.3		delonghi.com.au
1	2000	48 x 107 x 8	8.8	0.9		atlantics.com.au
1	2200	60 x 16 x 16	3.2	1.8		delonghi.com.au
3	2400	43 x 63 x 10	4.0	2.2		delonghi.com.au
3	2000	38 x 60 x 10	2.8	1.5		oo.com.au
1	2400	44 x 90 x 10	7.0	1.8		noirot.com.au
4	2400	63 x 52 x 15	7.9	2.0		kambrook.com.au
1	2400	50 x 92 x 8	13.9	1.3		omegaaltise.com.au
2	2000	60 x 58 x 17	5.7	1.6	✓	cdbgoldair.com.au
1	2200	54 x 100 x 10	7.4	1.8		rinnai.com.au
2	1800	30 x 19 x 16	2.0	2.0		sunbeam.com.au
2	2000	43 x 65 x 11	3.7	1.8		omegaaltise.com.au
3	2000	38 x 60 x 10	2.9	1.5		bigw.com.au
3	2400	63 x 51 x 15	12.7	1.5	✓	gafcontrol.com.au
3	2000	64 x 79 x 90	7.8	2.7	✓	sunbeam.com.au
2	2400	65 x 63 x 15	5.1	1.8	✓	bunnings.com.au
1	2000	46 x 74 x 10	6.4	1.4		atlantics.com.au
2	2400	63 x 53 x 15	13.9	1.4	✓	dimplex.com.au
2	2200	45 x 94 x 9	7.2	1.5		everdure.com.au
3	2400	55 x 95 x 6	6.8	1.7		omegaaltise.com.au
1	2400	45 x 89 x 7	7.4	1.4		atlantics.com.au
3	2400	64 x 57 x 16	18.6	2.2	✓	delonghi.com.au
2	2400	63 x 54 x 14	10.8	2.1	✓	dimplex.com.au
1	2200	44 x 94 x 7	7.0	1.5		everdure.com.au
3	2000	40 x 53 x 10	2.8	2.3		delonghi.com.au
3	2400	63 x 53 x 14	13.3	1.8	✓	kambrook.com.au
3	2400	63 x 54 x 14	10.9	2.1	✓	dimplex.com.au
1	2000	44 x 74 x 10	6.5	1.8		noirot.com.au
3	2400	59 x 65 x 13	7.5	1.7	✓	omegaaltise.com.au
3	2400	59 x 47 x 12	9.0	1.4	✓	1300 366 155

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of April 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of heating performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Safety tests** The Noirot 7358-8T failed the cord anchorage test (which tests whether the power cord sufficiently resists being pulled out of the appliance), although we think this is a one-off problem. The Omega Altise OMC24E1 failed the towel drape test – see About the Rest, right. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. *Compared with other models on test. ** Rounded to the nearest unit. **ns** Not stated. **na** Not applicable. **(A)** Thermostat can be set from 0-37°C. **(B)** 5°C thermostat setting. **(C)** For heat settings 3 and 4 only. **(D)** One heat setting, 10 airflow settings.

WHAT TO BUY

79%

Dyson Hot + Cool AM05

Good points

- Very good heating performance
- Good comparative energy efficiency
- Thermostat can be set between 0°C and 37°C
- Can also cool (in fan-only mode)
- Bladeless fan
- Remote control

Bad points

- Comparatively expensive and noisy
- No cord storage

Note: the Dyson AM04 and AM05 were subject to a recall (see dysonrecall.com) in 2014 due to short-circuiting in a small number of samples. New stock is not affected.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

70% DeLonghi HCS2552FTS (*CHOICE*, Jun 12) $149

Note: in previous years this model has tended to sell out early in the cold season.

ABOUT THE REST

Of the other newly tested models, the **DeLonghi HS25F** has good heating performance but is let down by its ease of use – the controls are very low down on the heater, it's difficult to grip and carry, and it has no cord storage. Most of the others are only OK for heating performance except the **Prima**, which is poor.

The **Goldair** failed an electrical safety test for cord anchorage, though this may have been a one-off failure as electrical appliances are routinely certified for this.

Two newly tested models failed a safety test in which we drape a towel over the heater to see if it detects a problem and shuts off before overheating. It's an extreme test, simulating misuse or accidental covering of the heater; the **Arlec** and **Mistral** suffered some minor damage. The **Kambrook KRH300** failed as it not only didn't shut down, but its plastic frame was heat-damaged and the heater didn't function properly afterwards. Heaters with radiant elements such as the Kambrook are particularly prone to failing this test. ■

Hearing is believing

Chris Ruggles bends an ear to find some sweet-sounding headphones

Keeping your ear out for a new set of headphones? A few of the models on test here can produce good sound, but that's not much use if they're uncomfortable to wear or fall apart the first time you drop them. That's why we not only put them through our usual raft of listening and technical tests, but also look into how well they fit, whether they leak sound out (see page 73) to annoy the person next to you, or leak sound in so you can hear too much from your environment. Oh – and we also drop them 10 times.

Fortunately, most managed our drop test well. The **Monster** and **Sony MDR-10RBT** had some bits fall off, but they were easily put back in place.

If you're likely to spend a lot of time in a quiet environment where you might annoy others, the **AKG K452** and **Monster** headphones are the best for keeping the sound in. However, they all leak to some extent, so keeping the volume down is probably a good idea.

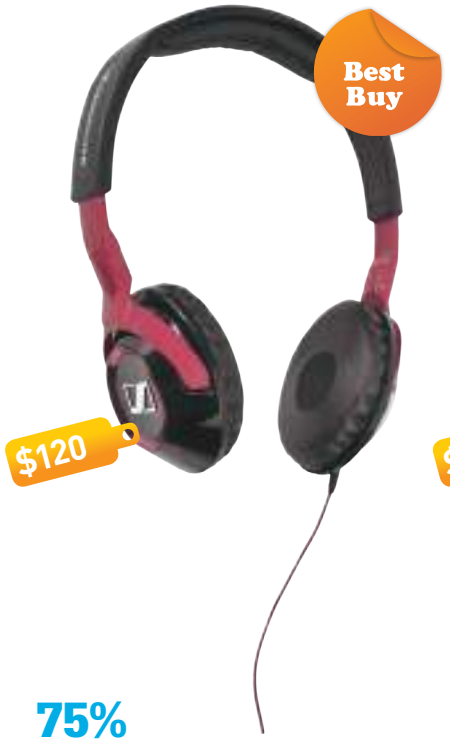
On the other hand, if you're surrounded by sound and want to block some of it out, the **AKG K518 DJ**, **Beats by Dr. Dre**, **Bose**, **Logitech** and **Sennheiser HD 229** are the best on test. To really get rid of distracting sound you should probably consider some noise-cancelling headphones, but none of those are on test here (see *CHOICE*, May 12).

Nutshell

- 13 on-ear and over-ear-type headphones tested, priced from $75 to $399.
- There's a lot more to a good pair of headphones than just how they sound.

Our panel found the **Bose**, **Sennheiser HD 229**, **PX 200-II** and **Sony MDR-10RBT** the most comfortable to wear. However, the Sony's comfort will depend on your ear size, as its cups may not fit over larger ears.

WHAT TO BUY



75%
Sennheiser HD 229

Good points
- Very good sound quality
- Comfortable due to light weight (91g), good fit and low pressure
- Good shielding against environmental noise
- Braille marking

Bad points
- No folding mechanism, although ear cups can be pivoted
- Cable cannot be removed
- No remote control or microphone
- No bag or case supplied
- Relatively high noise leakage

75%
Sennheiser Momentum On-Ear

Good points
- Removable cable
- Two cables delivered – one with remote control/microphone and one without
- Three button remote control – volume adjustment possible with Apple devices
- Ear cushions can be removed
- One hand handling quite good
- Braille marking
- Relatively good user guide
- Very good and generally well balanced sound, but the bass is slightly over-emphasised

Bad points
- No folding or pivot mechanism, which reduces portability
- Limited functionality with Android devices, none with Nokia Windows phone
- Limited acoustic shielding

Humming can help limit damage if you're surrounded by loud noise.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Comfort factor

Different-sized heads and ears and areas of sensitivity mean that a set that feels great for one person may be uncomfortable for another. We measured the force each headphone applies to the head and found some correlation between comfort and force with on-ear headphones. Over-ear headphones don't press directly on the ear, but can still be uncomfortable depending on the design of the headphone and how well it fits.

- **Circumaural ("over ear") headphones** completely surround your ear, and may provide added passive noise-cancelling properties. The cushioning effect may also help make them comfortable to wear for long periods. The downside is that they can get hot and sweaty after a while, and they're often large and bulky to store and carry.

- **Supra-aural ("on ear") headphones** are generally smaller. They rest on your ears, providing more airflow around them. However, they may keep out less noise and some press rather firmly on the ears, and most people find this uncomfortable pretty quickly. So before you buy a set of these headphones, try them out first – and leave them on for as long as the salesperson will allow.

If you enjoy loud music, you should rest your ears for 10 minutes every hour to help limit damage.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Monster** headphones have very good sound and the cable can be attached on either the right or left – the only one in this test. The remote control and microphone work well with Apple devices, but are limited with Android one and don't work at all with the Nokia Windows phone we tested them on. This is also true for the Beats by Dr. Dre and Logitech**.**

The Bose set lack clarity and have too much bass. They are very portable and light but have no microphone or remote control.

The Sennheiser PX 200-II are also very portable and light, but don't have a microphone or remote control. Sound quality is OK except for some poor low-frequency response.

The Beats by Dr. Dre come very close to getting a good sound quality score, but the listening panel felt they were too coloured and a bit hollow sounding. Surprisingly, although they have good shielding against environmental noise, they do leak sound.

The **Logitech** sounded a little dull to our listening panel. They have good environmental shielding, but there's no folding or pivoting mechanism.

The Philips sound quality largely depends on how well they fit. If they fit well then that borders on good, but only a slight movement will reduce the quality markedly, which is a problem given the fixed ear cups. They have a one-button remote control and microphone for operating smartphones, however the button is hard to identify by touch, which limits ease of use.

The AKG K518 DJ headphones sound OK but put a lot of pressure on the head, which could make them uncomfortable fairly quickly. The long (2.5m) twin cable is fixed and there's no microphone or remote control.

The AKG K452 headphones have dull sound and little acoustic shielding against environmental noise. They're light and portable and come with two cables – one with a remote control and one without. The remote control works with Android and the Nokia Windows phone in this test, but not Apple devices.

The Technics RP-DH1200 have a removable cable, but their relative high pressure and heavy weight make them uncomfortable to wear for long periods.

The sound quality of the Sony MDR-10RBT and the Panasonic didn't impress our listening panel at all. They found the Sony overly emphasise the bass, which becomes tiring very quickly, and the Panasonic headphones are dull and overly coloured. However, the Sony MDR-10RBT headphones do connect via cable or Bluetooth.

		PERFORMANCE					FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Listening panel (%)	Ease of use (%)	Isolation (%)	Drop test (%)	iPod controls	Android controls	Microphone	Bluetooth connection	Detachable ear pads	Carry bag	Earcup type	Weight (g, with cable)	Driver diameter (mm)
Sennheiser HD 229	120	75	83	57	61	100							On ear	91	ns
Sennheiser Momentum On-Ear	300	75	80	67	59	90	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	On ear	165	ns
Bose OE2 Audio Headphones	229	68	63	74	58	100					✓	✓	On ear	105	ns
Monster DNA On-Ear Headphones	229	68	76	53	86	50	✓	✓	✓			✓	On ear	186	ns
Sennheiser PX 200-II	130	68	67	63	73	100						✓	On ear	87	ns
Beats by Dr. Dre Solo HD	259	67	69	72	59	20	✓	✓	✓			✓	On ear	179	ns
Logitech UE 4000	150	66	60	71	67	100	✓	✓	✓			✓	On ear	152	ns
Philips SHL5505BK	100	64	69	48	56	100	✓	✓	✓				On ear	116	40
AKG K518 DJ	110	57	65	33	58	100						✓	On ear	168	ns
AKG K452	200	52	49	46	85	100		✓	✓			✓	On ear	123	ns
Sony MDR-10RBT	300	52	39	72	70	60	✓	✓	✓	✓(A)		✓	Over ear (B)	229	40
Technics RP-DH1200	399	52	53	40	71	100						✓	Over ear (B)	446	50
Panasonic RP-DJS400A	75	43	43	37	52	80							Over ear (B)	157	40

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of Apr 14. **Scores** The overall score is made up of listening test (60%), ease of use (30%), isolation (5%) and drop test (5%). For details of how we test, log **ns** not stated. **S** Single asymmetric. **R** Removable. **T** Twin symmetric. **L-R** Either left or right. **(A)** Bluetooth transmission has SBC, apt-x and AAC, which may result in better sound quality, depending on phone or other Bluetooth device. **(B)** Only if you have bigger ears.

What to look for

A **volume control**, preferably on the cable, can come in handy, although if you're listening to music on an MP3 player you can usually alter its volume without too much trouble.

A good **hard case** protects your headphones and keeps extra attachments in order when you're travelling. A soft pouch can be easier to pack, but doesn't give as much protection.

Leakage is where sound escapes the headphones and can be heard by others in your vicinity. Open headphones tend to leak more than closed models because they are designed to allow more air to get through the casing. Some listeners will prefer the airier sound of an open design, while others will find the potential isolation of the closed models more important.

IMAGES: SENNHEISER / SHUTTERSTOCK

Efficiency is a measure of the amount of voltage necessary to drive the headphones. More-efficient headphones need less power, but may be capable of producing very high volumes that could damage your hearing if used for long periods. Low efficiency may mean the headphones won't produce much volume with low voltage devices (a small personal music player, for instance).

Cables should be long enough to allow you to reach a music player or aircraft sound plug connection comfortably without entangling you in excess wire. A detachable cable keeps it out of your way, if you just want a quiet environment to listen to nothing at all.

Plugs should fit the music player.

Cable length (cm) simple / with remote control)	Cable type	Warranty (years)	Contact
148 / na	S	2	syntec.com.au
145 / 136	S, R	2	syntec.com.au
139 / na	S, R	1	bose.com.au
130 / 130	S, R, L-R	1	e-hifi.com.au
124 / na	S	2	syntec.com.au
na / 135	S, R	1	au.beatsbydre.com
na / 136	S, R	1	ultimateears.com/en-au
na / 132	S, R	1	powermove.com.au
247 / na	T	2	audioproducts.com.au
128 / 128	S, R	2	audioproducts.com.au
124 / na	S, R	1	sony.com.au
125 / na	S, R	1	panasonic.com.au
127 / na	T	1	panasonic.com.au

on to **choice.com.au/headphones TABLE NOTES na** Not applicable. smartphone and audio file quality. It also has NFC for easier pairing with a

Volume control

Most of us can expect to lose the ability to hear some frequencies as we age. However, excessive volume can speed this process and result in quite serious hearing loss if we overdo it. We found the **AKG K452**, **Panasonic** and **Monster** headphones can easily exceed volumes that could be dangerous to your long-term hearing. It's wise to keep volume levels low initially to avoid very loud surprises with any headphones. As a general rule, if you can't hear a normal conversation about a metre away, your volume is too loud.

Also, cutting out ambient noise can make it hard to hear things that are happening around you. It's a dangerous practice to wear headphones or earplugs of any sort when driving or riding a bike. ■

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We're not sure the level of protection on these iPhone cases is quite up to scratch.

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$10.90

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$10.90

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